SPECIAL EatingWell EDITION

WEIGHT LOSS
A Healthy Plan

A SIMPLE LIFESTYLE / THE BEST WAYS TO EXERCISE / TASTY RECIPES, EASY MEAL PLANS

WHAT THE SCIENCE SAYS

EatingWell

WEIGHT LOSS

A Healthy Plan

Roasted Cauliflower & Walnut Dip, recipe at eatingwell.com/cauliflowerdip

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Parts of this special edition were previously published. This book is for general information purposes only, and nothing contained in it is intended to substitute for individualized advice from a physician or other health professional. The reader should consult the appropriate health professional in matters relating to physical and mental health and particularly with respect to any symptoms that may require diagnosis or treatment.

COVER: Cobb Salad with Herb-Rubbed Chicken, recipe at eatingwell.com/cobbsalad

BBQ Chicken Tacos with Red Cabbage Slaw, recipe at eatingwell.com/chickentacos

INTRODUCTION

A PATH TO HEALTHY WEIGHT LOSS

By being wary of fad diets and practicing the basics of healthy eating, you can find a sustainable way to manage your weight.

BY VANESSA RISSETTO, MS, RD, CDN

"I want to lose weight, but I'm not sure if that's okay." I hear this often from patients when they call seeking nutrition help from our registered dietitians at Culina Health. Diet culture has been pervasive in our society for generations, but somewhere along the line it became synonymous with weight management, leaving people feeling ashamed for caring about the number on the scale.

As a registered dietitian, I believe that losing weight can be a perfectly reasonable goal if it's pursued in a healthy, realistic way. Proper nutrition tools and strategies can help people break free from weight obsession. But to understand these practical tools, we first need to look at how fad diets skewed our perspective on nutrition and weight.

Fad diets are those that become trendy—usually for a short amount of time—despite not being based on any solid scientific research or evidence. In 2020, Americans spent $71 billion on such diets. And the messaging is everywhere: Go keto. Eat paleo. Try being a carnivore. No, go plant-based. Fast and eat during a limited window. Time your window around your circadian rhythms. High carbs, low fat. No carbs, high fat. Avoid sugar, but agave is okay. Drink celery juice. Ditch alcohol. No more nightshades. Coat everything in coconut oil. Avoid coconut oil. Eat eggs. Don't eat eggs. Treat yourself, don't restrict. Have the cookie, drink the wine—but not *that* cookie, or wine that shade of red.

But as the amount of money we throw at fad diets increases, so does the percentage of the population that's overweight and obese—and the number of people suffering from nutrition-related chronic illnesses like heart disease and diabetes. In other words, we're dieting more but becoming sicker. How is this possible?

A celebrity lost 50 pounds of baby weight by eating only celery sticks at the quarter moon? Cue the fad diet and celery stock going up by 500 percent. But most fad diets aren't entirely evidence-based, meaning they haven't been tested in the population in order to determine whether they confer any benefit. When we say they aren't evidence-based, we mean that they haven't been extensively studied, or that studies have been inconclusive. We need randomized controlled studies over a prolonged period of time to understand if they actually work. Fad diets can often help you achieve fast weight loss and change how you look and feel. But sustainability often seems to be a challenge. Research helps us determine which diets are actually sustainable as opposed to just being a quick fix that will lead to rebound weight gain later. For example, a

sustainable weight loss is one to two pounds a week. If you lose a significant amount of weight rapidly due to a severe calorie restriction, your body will likely go into panic mode, thinking that you're experiencing a famine, and will slow down your metabolism and turn up your hunger hormones—both of which can lead to weight gain.

If a diet requires cutting out an entire food group, the diet probably won't work in the long term, and, further, it might make you deficient in certain nutrients if it's very restrictive. For example, it's really difficult to cut out all carbs—a hot topic thanks to the popular ketogenic diet. The keto diet is a high-fat, low-carb eating plan designed to shift your body into burning stored fat. One of the main benefits is that it moves people away from consuming large quantities of refined carbs and added sugar, which are linked to weight gain. The problem is that it's limiting and really difficult to sustain—imagine never eating a piece of bread or a cookie ever again! We live in a world of delicious options that we can and should enjoy in moderation. Going the drastic route of killing all carbs isn't necessary—you can reduce your refined carb and sugar intake without going to the extreme. Plus, most available studies lack validity due to small sample sizes and short duration. Because of the limited number of robust studies and lack of strong evidence evaluating the keto's potential risks, this kind of diet may lead to unwanted outcomes such as rebound weight gain in the end.

The good news is that there's no need for anything super restrictive or unsustainable for healthy weight loss. Keep reading to find out what might truly work for you.

Be Consistent

Another popular fad diet is intermittent fasting, where you fast for a prolonged period of time (say, 7 p.m. to 7 a.m.), then eat whatever you please during the other hours. But, at the end of the day, if you find yourself eating cookies, chips and whatever other carbs you can get your hands on, fasting is probably not for you. Instead, try to eat consistently throughout the day. Aim to have breakfast within two hours of waking, and then eat every three to four hours. People often don't want a huge breakfast; it could be as simple as yogurt with berries, a piece of toast with an egg, or a quarter cup of oatmeal made

with almond milk and a cup of berries. Just make sure to have something with protein, fat and carbohydrates to help you feel properly fueled. This also promotes optimal blood sugar levels, because when fiber, protein and fat are combined, the nutrients slow down the digestion of the carbohydrates and delay their absorption into the blood, which prevents spikes—and subsequent drops—in your glucose levels.

Eat Your Fruits and Veggies

Aim for four to five servings. What's a serving? One cup of leafy greens, half a cup of cooked veggies, a piece of fruit about the size of a tennis ball or a cup of berries. Fiber from fruits and vegetables helps with satiety—the more full you feel, the less likely you are to overeat. Increased fruit and vegetable intake is said to lower blood pressure and reduce the risk of heart disease. It's also believed that those who eat more fruits and vegetables daily have better health outcomes overall. One study found that individuals who consumed more servings of fruit and vegetables—approximately five servings per day—had lower instances of mortality, meaning they lived longer, likely due to the benefits of those foods. It's also helpful to keep in mind that eating a variety of colors of fruits and vegetables is a good goal to aim for. The different hues actually represent different vitamins and minerals that can benefit your overall health. For example, carrots are orange and have beta-carotene, which helps with eye health, while eggplants are purple and high in anthocyanin, which has a positive effect on brain health, inflammation and heart disease.

Watch for Added Sugar

The American Heart Association recommends less than 24 grams of sugar daily for women and less than 36 grams for men. Research indicates that diets high in added sugar can contribute to heart disease, because these diets also tend to lack fiber and are often high in sodium because of overconsumption of processed foods. Added sugar is generally something that can be calculated—for example, a food item may have 5 grams of sugar and 3 grams of added sugar. But most of us don't actually understand what that means. Sugar occurs naturally in a food such as apples in the form of fructose, but sometimes, in order to make applesauce sweeter, manufacturers add sugar to enhance the flavor. This doesn't mean you can't ever eat dessert, but if eating too much sugar tends to be an issue for you, ask yourself: Are you not eating enough during the day, which is causing the cravings for something sugary, or not eating enough of of those blood-sugar-balancing foods (fat, fiber-rich carbs and protein)? Our Small Batch Cookie recipe on page 77 is a yummy treat that's appropriately portioned to help satisfy your craving.

Get Those Steps In

Walking 10,000 steps a day has been shown to lead to weight reduction. Of those steps, 3,500 should be moderate to vigorous activity, which is in line with studies from the past. Those previous studies say that moderate to vigorous activity is consistent with cardioprotective benefits and overall health. Haven't been walking in a while? No worries—simply getting out there should be the goal that you start with. If you have a dog that you walk for 15 minutes, try to tack on an extra 15. If you have a friend you want to catch up with, ask them to go for a walk. The 10,000-step mark doesn't need to be your north star, but it is nice to have the validation that walking is also an option for exercise and can elicit the same result as running on a treadmill if you choose.

Going the drastic route of killing all carbs isn't necessary—you can reduce your refined carb and sugar intake without going to the extreme.

Ultimately, how you go about tackling weight loss is a personal choice, and you'll be more likely to stick to your goals if you choose delicious foods and activities that bring you joy. Fad diets that focus on restriction and calorie counting are not the only ways that work (and remember, they tend to work for only a limited time). Just because your neighbor was able to lose weight by calorie counting doesn't mean that's the way you should go about it. We are individuals, and we can go about this in a number of ways. Consistency and a varied diet that includes plenty of fruits and vegetables are great places to start. ●

CHAPTER 1

THE SCIENCE OF WEIGHT LOSS

While trendy diets claim to ensure rapid weight loss, a healthy diet creates a safer and more sustainable approach.

UNDERSTANDING WEIGHT CHANGES

A variety of factors contribute to weight loss or gain, including genetics, energy needs and muscle growth. Here's how lifestyle can influence your weight and how to prioritize healthfulness.

BY NOVELLA LUI, RD, MHSc

If you do an online search of the words *weight management,* you'll get 1,980,000,000—that's one billion nine hundred eighty million—results, a figure indicating that many people are trying to manage their weight. (The weight loss industry boasts annual revenue of $72.6 million.) With all that information circulating online about how to maintain or lose weight, how can we recognize facts and weed out misinformation? Exploring the science behind how and why your weight changes—the physiological processes behind weight loss and weight gain, and whether innate factors like genetics and biological sex or external considerations such as the environment impact the number on the scale—can be key.

The human body is made up of fat-free mass and fat. The former includes water, organs, skeletal muscles and bones; the latter is stored as energy for later use. The body uses energy to sustain basic physiological functions, filter blood, excrete waste through the kidneys and support brain functions. It needs a minimum amount of energy (basal metabolic rate) to maintain these functions. Energy is used to digest food, absorb nutrients and produce heat to maintain the body temperature. Plus, energy use fuels physical activity.

Our body digests the food we eat and breaks down the macronutrients in it—carbohydrates, protein and fat—into their building blocks. It prefers to use glucose, a type of sugar and one of the building blocks of carbohydrates. It changes extra glucose into glycogen and fat. The former is stored in the liver and skeletal muscles.

Fat is stored in adipose tissues underneath the skin, around the organs (visceral fat) and in bone

marrow, providing a protective cushion to various body parts. When excess energy is consumed from protein and fat, both macronutrients are converted into fat, resulting in increased size of the fat cells (hypertrophy) and/or a surge in the quantity of the fat cells (hyperplasia).

For adult men, extra fat is stored under the skin in the abdominal area. Premenopausal women have excess fat stored in their hips, thighs, and buttocks. When fat tissues can no longer hold more fat, the excess may get stored in muscles and vital organs, such as the liver, heart and pancreas, increasing the risk of various diseases.

During exercise or hours after the last meal of the day, the body uses glycogen as fuel for energy to maintain blood glucose levels. Once the glycogen is used up, the liver converts fat into ketones and uses it as energy.

Why Weight Changes

Energy intake and output influence body weight. In other words, what we eat and drink provides us with the fuel to sustain bodily functions and is used as energy. Ideally, we are able to maintain a healthy weight in a balanced state in which we consume and then use around the same amount of energy.

We may notice that we have put on some weight when our clothes feel too snug, our abs are bloated or, more obvious, when we see that the number on the scale has increased. While the increase could be due to more energy consumed than the amount burnt, other factors may also contribute to weight gain. Often we need to determine what type of weight gain the change really is.

For example, some exercises, such as resistance training, can lead to muscle growth, which results in weight gain. We may also see an increase in weight when we eat more calories from food and drinks and the extra calories are converted and stored as a type of fat (triacylglycerols) for later use, such as during fasting, famine and extended periods of exercise.

Fluid retention causes a temporary weight gain; weight may surge due to the extra water to balance the body's electrolyte levels. Various conditions cause fluid retention, including hot weather, pregnancy, certain medications and a meal high in salt.

Conversely, weight loss can be categorized into three types: 1) A cutback in fat mass; 2) a reduction in muscle mass, allowing more energy to be expended than gained through food intake; 3) temporary weight loss caused when certain medications, such as diuretics and laxatives, lead to more frequent urination and bowel movements.

Of course, regular exercise may induce weight loss, which also increases heat production. A 2022 review of studies published in the journal *Obesity Reviews* found that exercises involving resistance training may lead to the loss of 5 kilograms (11 pounds) of body weight and significantly reducing body fat. Despite their success in sticking to a weight loss plan, many people may notice that losing those "last few pounds" often becomes a struggle, indicating that they may have reached a plateau at which their weight no longer wants to budge.

Our bodies adapt to weight loss with protective mechanisms. These include slowed metabolism, increased hunger hormones and decreased fullness hormones, which leads to increased appetite, all of which can create a yo-yo effect. "The next time we attempt to lose weight, it is often harder than the last time," says Brittany Wehrle, RD, LD, a Dallas-based dietitian and board-certified specialist in sports dietetics.

Beyond the Scale

Realistically, maintaining a healthy weight is more complicated than simply using an online tool or app for guidance or following the general rule of eating less and exercising more. For instance, certain medications can also affect our appetite, leading to weight gain or loss over time. Stress and anxiety can also induce weight gain or loss, depending on whether medications are involved and how we manage our emotional state.

Lisa Bailey-Davis, RD, an investigator and associate director at the Geisinger Obesity Institute in Danville, Pennsylvania, recommends putting the number on the scale in perspective. She notes that reducing weight stigma is a necessary shift at the individual and societal levels, but finding the balance between physical, emotional and social domains of health that favor your wellness is also key to weight management. According to Bailey-Davis, someone who is looking to lose weight for their health does not need to set extensive goals. Just losing 7 to 10 percent of your body weight is optimal for physical health. That amount, which is 10 pounds for a 200 pound individual, can ease your joints, prevent type 2 diabetes and improve cardiovascular health.

Genetics significantly determine a given person's "healthy" weight—often referred to as a set point weight range. "Some people are just more susceptible to weight gain than others," Bailey-Davis says.

Wehrle points out, "There are studies of individuals who were adopted very early in life [that show] a strong association between the adopted child's weight and their biological parents' weight, yet [there is] no correlation between the body sizes of the adopted child and the adoptive parents."

While our genes play a big role in our health, our environment and behaviors are also critical players in affecting our body weight. According to the Centers for Disease Conrol and Prevention, how active we are, how much sleep we get, our emotional state and how much we eat can alter how our body interprets DNA sequences. "Various factors like stress, trauma, chronic illness and the general aging process may [also] impact our weight, even in the absence of significant changes in our food or exercise," says Wehrle.

Our bodies adapt to weight loss with protective mechanisms. These include slowed metabolism and increased hunger hormones.

Health Before Weight

Our society has placed so much emphasis on appearance that it has created weight stigma, a perception suggesting that slimness is the foundation of good health and beauty. Susan Yanovski, MD, codirector of the Office of Obesity Research of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, recently said in a Facebook livestream event that there is no simple answer to what to eat to manage weight. "[The answer will not be] the same for people of different ages and sizes," she points out.

Coupling lifestyle changes with cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) may increase the long-term success of maintaining a healthy weight. The American Psychological Association describes CBT as a form of behavioral counseling that focuses on changing unhealthy thinking patterns

and learning skills to combat self-blame, creating strategies to manage negative emotions that do not involve eating, and developing healthier perspectives and habits around food, exercise and sleep.

The Bottom Line

Your body weight is affected by a complex mix of lifestyle factors, genetics, environment and behavior. "Striving for a path toward wellness that integrates multiple dimensions of health at the individual level can foster shifts in social norms about healthy weight," says Bailey-Davis.

Beyond any given person, however, managing weight is also a collective effort, according to Dr. Yanovski: "We also need environmental and community-based approaches—that is, shaping policies to make the healthy choice the easy choice."

While policies and societal weight stigma may not change overnight, you can make your own changes. Instead of obsessing over the number on the scale, focus on nourishing your body regularly with balanced meals and snacks, and aim to eat enough to feel comfortable and energized. Wehlre adds, "Regularly move in ways that you enjoy, and prioritize adequate sleep and practice stress management as needed." These health-promoting behaviors can greatly reduce your stress around weight and just might put you in better health overall.

Simply put, when you focus less on what the scale is telling you, you may be more willing and motivated to stick to an exercise routine and a reasonably balanced diet, "because they are not being driven by the shame around weight anymore," Wehlre says. "It's a win-win!" ●

The Truth About Supplements

Save your money for something more effective.

BY JESSICA BALL, MS, RD

There are more than 80,000 supplements on the market today, according to the U.S. Government Accountablity Office. Many claim they'll improve your health in some way or another, and for some, this includes claims around weight loss. We've all heard the ads or seen various weight-loss supplements at the store. But are they really worth your dollar? As a registered dietitian, I'm already wary. The supplement industry isn't well regulated, so you never really know what you're going to get. And I'm especially cautious of supplements that boast fast or significant weight loss if you use their product. The reason? Well, there are a few. Here's why I don't recommend weight-loss supplements—plus what you can do instead to lose weight in a healthier, more realistic way.

THEY AREN'T EFFECTIVE

Even if a supplement claims that using it will lead to weight loss, that doesn't mean it actually will. A recent review of 315 clinical trials of weight-loss supplements found they did not produce much, if any, weight loss among participants. The evidence to support supplements was so weak that the study authors included a perspective, urging regulatory authorities to take a closer look at supplements marketed for weight loss. This is in large part because they aren't effective, but also because they might not even be safe. Studies have found that people who have taken over-the-counter weight-loss supplements have reported liver failure, kidney impairment, the worsening of chronic ailments and more.

THEY'RE EXPENSIVE

As someone on a budget, this is a hard stop for me. A study out of Duke University found that the expected annual cost of taking three brands of popular weight-loss supplements was over $1,300 each. That's a lot of money that could be spent in healthier ways, be it on fresh produce, whole foods or other non-food-related activities you enjoy.

THEY'RE UNREGULATED

Supplements are totally unregulated. This means that there is no organization checking that these products are safe, effective or accurately labeled before they go to market. While there are ways to vet supplements to make

sure they're actually what they say they are, over-the-counter supplements with strong claims surrounding weight loss should be a red flag. More often than not, these claims are not substantiated and should not be made by the manufacturers. However, they get away with making these kinds of claims due to the lack of regulation of their products.

THEY AREN'T SUSTAINABLE

Sustainable weight loss is achieved through small behavior changes over time. One of the main issues with weight-loss supplements is that to sustain any weight loss, you need to continue to take the supplement. It's not viable or potentially even safe to take a weight-loss supplement for any amount of time, so any weight you lose will likely be gained back when you stop taking the supplement.

THE BOTTOM LINE

While there are some FDA-approved medications that may help with weight loss, over-the-counter supplements are not included in the list. And even the FDA-approved meds come with their own lists of side effects. Instead of using weight-loss supplements, your time and money would be better spent on lifestyle changes that can lead to weight loss if that is your goal. Instead, I would recommend that someone trying to lose weight stick to safe and proven methods, such as diet, exercise and a healthy lifestyle.

Your Body, Your Rules

It's the ultimate body positivity question: Can you love your shape *and* want to change it?

BY LESLIE GOLDMAN

When it comes to weight and body image, the American public is on the receiving end of a lot of mixed messages. The body positivity movement urges us to accept ourselves as we are and to reject the tired old beauty norms that value thinness and perfection. But at the same time, we're told it's important to maintain a healthy weight, given that being overweight or obese is linked to many of the leading causes of death in the U.S., including heart disease and cancer.

It's a confusing landscape, and Rebecca Scritchfield, RDN, author of *Body Kindness: Transform Your Health from the Inside Out—and Never Say Diet Again,* has traveled through it personally. She spent her teens and 20s restricting calories and berating her thighs. She became a registered dietitian to help people "get healthy," which at the time, she says, was code for dieting. And some of her clients did lose weight—only to regain it. Early on, Scritchfield discovered the Health at Every Size (HAES) movement, which celebrates body diversity, "life-enhancing movement" and flexible, pleasurable eating.

Now the owner of a well-being practice in Washington, D.C., she says that one question she's often asked is: "Can I love my body and still want to change it?" The answer, according to Scritchfield, is yes. But it's complicated. Here's some advice from her and other experts on navigating weight concerns.

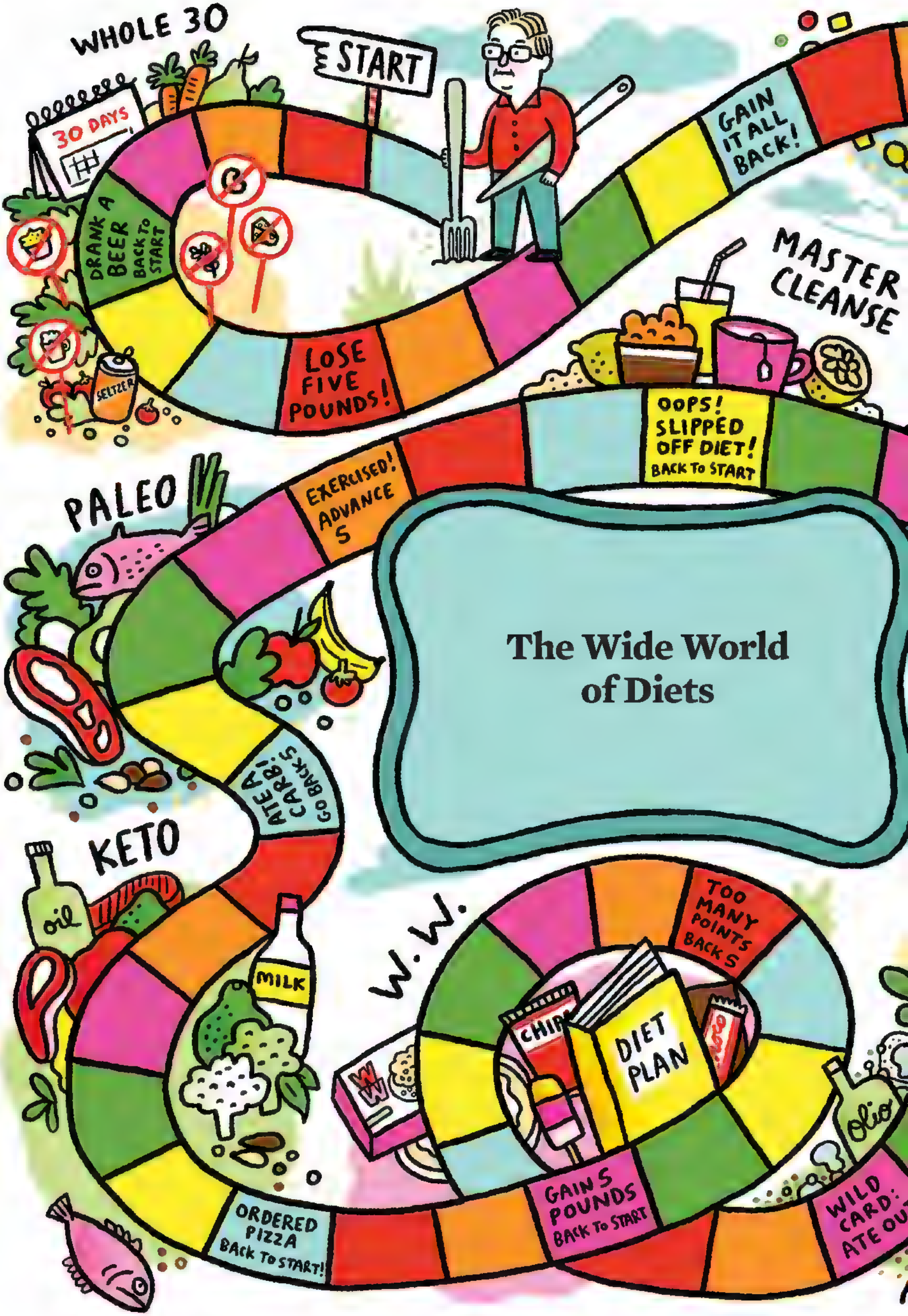
Know Your Why. If your weight is high enough to cause health issues—whether it's a condition like diabetes or nagging joint pain that's holding you back from activities you love—then losing even a few pounds can help, says Scott Kahan, MD, MPH, director of the National Center for Weight and Wellness in Washington, D.C. Just make sure you're doing it for the right reasons: overall health and feeling comfortable in your own skin, he suggests. And be realistic about the changes you want to make. "We're not all supposed to be skinny, just like we're not all supposed to be tall, have small feet or excel at math," says Michelle V. Scott, a health and wellness social worker in Buffalo, New York, host of *The F.A.T. (Fulfilled, Actualized and Transcendent) Life* podcast.

Focus on Self-Care, Not the Scale. This approach puts the emphasis on wellness-promoting behaviors that will get you to your goal rather than the outcome itself. And Dr. Kahan says that's what helps people stay on the path of body positivity. So ditch the restrictive diet mindset and instead think about what you can add to your life rather than take away. That might mean

eating more produce, moving your body in ways that feel good, tuning in to your hunger cues, eating mindfully and banning the food police that deem celery more virtuous than chocolate. As you begin to make these healthy changes, Scritchfield encourages you to also think about how you can care for your body and create more joy in these experiences. For example, maybe that will mean taking a moment to appreciate your surroundings on a walk or adding some upbeat music to a spontaneous dance session.

Be Compassionate. Body shame is linked to low self-esteem, depression, disordered eating and other mental health issues—and has absolutely no place in your life. Abandon the all-or-nothing mentality that you're either skinny and healthy or overweight and sick. Mute your inner critic by asking yourself: "Would I say these kinds of things to the people I love most?" And lean into your inner caregiver, Scritchfield suggests. Showing yourself compassion can take the form of simply doing something nice for yourself (bubble bath?), surrounding yourself with positive people and appreciating all of the amazing things your body can do. ●

Reviewed by Victoria Seaver, MS, RD


WHOLE 30
30 DAYS
START
GAIN IT ALL BACK!
MASTER CLEANSE
DRANK A BEER BACK TO START
LOSE FIVE POUNDS!
SELTZER
OOPS! SLIPPED OFF DIET! BACK TO START
PALEO
EXERCISED! ADVANCE 5
The Wide World of Diets
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ORDERED PIZZA BACK TO START!
GAINS POUNDS BACK TO START
WILD CARD: ATE OUT

THE MAN WHO TRIED EVERY DIET

A writer spent three years on one diet plan or another. He also dug into the bizarre history of diets, consulted experts and learned a few things about what helps the pounds come off—and stay off.

BY BARRY ESTABROOK

My doctor delivered the bad news at the end of a routine physical several years ago. My blood pressure and cholesterol levels were dangerously elevated, even with maximum doses of medication. All signs suggested that, having entered my 60s, I was headed down the path taken by too many men in my family. One of my grandfathers died young from cardiac disease. My father suffered the first of two heart attacks at age 58 and eventually died of a stroke at 70. My brother passed away at 64 from a massive heart attack. With more meds out of the question, I only had one option: to lose weight. At least 40 pounds.

I had fattened up gradually. Being a bit (and eventually quite a bit) overweight didn't bother me. I was strong and active, and there was always at least one fatter guy around. But lately I had noticed that hiking, cycling and cross-country skiing, all of which I loved, were becoming harder and less enjoyable. The lumpy guy who looked back at me

from the mirror no longer fit the image I had of myself. My first grandchild had recently arrived, which gave me another important reason to want to stick around. And I'll admit, there was an element of vanity. I decided to do something I had avoided for my entire life: I went on a diet.

Down the Diet Rabbit Hole

I knew the odds were stacked against me. In 2007, Traci Mann, PhD, a psychologist who researches eating behaviors at the University of Minnesota, analyzed more than 30 weight-loss studies in what is still the most comprehensive review of research on diets to date. Typically, participants dropped between 5 and 10 percent of their body weight—but only temporarily. Within two years, four out of five participants weighed more than they did initially. There are many reasons for the dismal success rate: Willpower flags. You go back to your old eating habits, and the pounds pile back on. And it seems like your body does everything it can to make you fail. A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that dieters had reduced levels of leptin, a hormone that makes you feel full, and increased levels of the hormone ghrelin, which makes you hungry—with the altered levels persisting even a year after they'd lost the weight. Still, I was determined to find a way to get rid of those extra pounds and keep them off.

My first attempt was a disaster. I decided to try Whole30, which I picked for precisely the wrong reason (although it's probably the same reason most people choose a diet): At the time, it was the fad du jour. It seemed like half the people I knew were on it. Whole30 is based on tough love taken to an extreme. For 30 days, I was to avoid a long list of foods, including virtually all dairy products, grains (even whole ones), legumes, alcohol and sugar or calorie-free sweeteners. *Eliminate* was the operative word. If I consumed even a minuscule amount of a forbidden item at any time during those 30 days—a nibble of cheese, a sip of pinot noir, a forkful of pasta—I would have to start all over again at Day 1. The program is a variation on the popular paleo diet, based on the theory that we modern humans would be thinner and healthier if only we ate what our Stone Age forebears had evolved to eat before the invention of agriculture: plenty of meat, lots of vegetables and little else.

I did survive my 30 days of deprivation, and when I stepped on the scale—something Whole30 had forbidden me to do while I was on the diet—I found that I had lost 13 pounds. I was more than a quarter of the way toward achieving my goal.

Then I promptly gained it all back. So I decided to apply my reporter's skills to my campaign to lose weight. I would read research papers and consult with doctors, nutritionists and other experts to find out what was happening to me and why—and what I should do about it. No more latching on to the latest fad. My journey became the basis of a book.

It turns out that my stint as a Whole30-er could have had more serious consequences than regaining those lost pounds. Laura Kerns, RD, a senior clinical dietitian at Ochsner Health in New Orleans, explained that eliminating grains and dairy products drastically reduced my intake of the B vitamins

Parsing the Diet Plans

My two cents on some of today's most popular weight-loss programs.

BY BARRY ESTABROOK

I tried all these popular diet programs so you don't have to. The good news: I lost weight on every one I attempted. The bad news: I inevitably gained every ounce back afterward—with the exception of diet #11. Here's what I learned along the way.

1. WHOLE30
This is the military boot camp of the diet world: no sugar, no dairy, no grains, no beans, no booze—and absolutely no cheating—for 30 days. A friend observed that it's easy; you just have to give up everything that makes life worth living. I lost 13 pounds and immediately regained every single one.

2. ORNISH
The meatless program aims to reduce heart disease by limiting fat intake to 10 percent or fewer of your daily calories and encouraging moderate exercise and meditation. I'm not the meditative sort, and I lasted five days before breaking down and ordering Korean barbecue beef ribs and a Manhattan.

3. SOUTH BEACH
Aka the "chop chop" diet because of the time spent cutting vegetables. Lean meats are fine, but you must avoid simple carbs, such as those in bread, pasta and sugary drinks. All that knife work became tiresome, especially when all I wanted for a workday lunch was a little meat between two slices of decent bread.

4. MASTER CLEANSE
If it was good enough for Beyoncé, I figured a diet limited to lemonade and laxative tea would be good enough for me. After four days, I nearly passed out from fatigue. Worth it, I suppose, if a studio is paying you millions to slim down for a movie role. Otherwise... probably not.

5. VEGETARIAN AND VEGAN
For me, joyless after a week or so, but useful because I discovered several quick, satisfying meatless recipes, including a full-flavored ratatouille and a silky red lentil soup that is a meal in itself. Those two have entered my permanent repertoire. And my physique thanked me.

6. PALEO
Paleo diets suggest eating only what our foraging, spear-throwing forebears would recognize as food: mostly meat and vegetables. In theory, the stuff that cave folks hunted and gathered is what our bodies evolved to consume. I had health concerns about so much meat, but I also concluded that our ancestors led pretty dull culinary lives.

7. KETO
Think paleo on steroids: Meat is good, fatty meat is even better and carbs are evil. When your body is deprived of carbohydrates, it resorts to breaking down your fat reserves into molecules called ketones for fuel. Studies show that you do lose weight in the short term. Two well-known side effects are "keto flu" and foul-smelling "dragon breath." Concerned about all that saturated fat, I also worried about dropping dead from a keto heart attack.

8. WW (FORMERLY WEIGHT WATCHERS)
Every morsel of food is assigned a certain number of points, and you can eat whatever you like as long as you don't exceed your daily allotment. Group sessions inspire you to stay on track, though I'm not a group guy. And I paid more than $50 a month to take part in this program.

9. MEDITERRANEAN
Heavy on herbs, vegetables, olive oil and seafood, and light on dairy and meat. The Greeks have been adhering to this way of eating for more than 2,500 years—and for good reasons. It taught me that eating a plant-heavy diet can be tasty, filling and healthful. And this way of eating can be applied to any type of cuisine—not just those from the Mediterranean region.

10. FRENCH PARADOX
Eat and drink the very best of anything, and do so at sit-down meals in the company of friends and loved ones. A major component of every French meal is joy. Just be mindful and practice moderation.

11. MY WAY
Okay, this isn't an official plan—but it is the diet that I found works best, based on the successful participants in the National Weight Control Registry (NWCR). It applies what I've dubbed the Frank Sinatra "My Way" approach: Find out what works for you—curbing sugary foods, not snacking after 8 p.m., weighing yourself daily—and then go for it. The results speak for themselves. More than 12,000 Americans in the NWCR have lost at least 30 pounds and kept them off for an average of six years. My goal is to someday join their ranks.

Reviewed by Victoria Seaver, MS, RD

thiamin, riboflavin, folate and niacin, particularly troubling because niacin levels can affect blood pressure. I was also missing out on fiber and the reduced risk of heart disease, diabetes and obesity that is linked to eating plenty of it.

Moreover, far from being a no-no, weighing yourself can be helpful. A study published in the *Journal of Obesity* is one of many showing that dieters who frequently step on the scale lose more weight than those who avoid it. Nor are "slips" reason for self-loathing. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 99.9 percent of dieters experience lapses. So as long as you don't allow yourself to become discouraged, those setbacks can be valuable learning experiences that lead to success. It's little wonder that *U.S. News & World Report* ranked Whole30 near the bottom of the more than three dozen diets the magazine evaluated for their efficacy and healthfulness.

Deprivation Through the Ages

In flunking my first diet, though, I had plenty of company. For more than two centuries, Americans have been suckers for an assortment of crooks, crackpots and quacks promising quick and easy weight loss. Many of the schemes foisted on our nation by gonzo-diet promoters seem almost humorous—if not flat-out reckless—today. In the late 1800s, Horace Fletcher, a San Francisco businessman, hit upon the notion that protracted chewing of every bite of food would not only make adherents healthier but would actually eliminate slums and crime. Fletcher decreed that every morsel must be chewed at a rate of 100 times a minute and swallowed only after it was liquefied and devoid of taste. This prevented "putrid decomposition" in the stomach and rendered feces no more odorous than a hot biscuit. He carried samples of his own excrement to prove that point. Under the slogan "Nature will castigate those who don't masticate," Fletcherism became an international phenomenon, adopted by luminaries including John D. Rockefeller, Thomas Edison and Franz Kafka. Socialites held Fletcher luncheons and timed their chews with stopwatches. One U.S. senator suggested that all American schoolchildren be taught Fletcherism.

The Great Masticator had ample off-the-wall competition in the 19th century. While treating Civil War soldiers on battlefields, J.H. Salisbury, MD, claimed to have discovered that a meat-only diet was the secret to a long, healthy life. A day's menu included three pounds of rump steak and a pound of codfish. Vegetables were forbidden, since Salisbury believed they caused heart disease, tumors and other "grave disturbances." His name survives in the Salisbury steaks made famous in 1950s-era frozen TV dinners. James Raymond Devereux, a New Zealander, took the opposite approach in his grandiosely titled book *Eating to Banish Disease and to Save Civilisation*. Meat was off the table. The first meal of the day had to be all vegetables, the second all fruit and the third all nuts. And New York physician William Hay, MD, insisted that the only way to stay slim was never to eat protein and carbohydrates in the same meal.

In the 1920s, the Hollywood Diet swept the nation as actors slimmed down by eating grapefruit and not much else. (Writing in his wise, ominously titled 1935 book, *Diet and Die*, Carl Malmberg, who would go on to be chief investigator for the U.S.

Senate Subcommittee on Health and Education, observed that "there are no figures to show how many people literally killed themselves or became seriously ill by following the popular starvation diet, but it is certain that the toll was heavy.") John Harvey Kellogg, MD, brother of the founder of the eponymous cereal company, reportedly fed patients with high blood pressure nothing but grapes—up to 14 pounds of them a day. The cabbage soup diet became all the rage despite having the unfortunate side effect of explosive flatulence. Other ploys were downright toxic: Lucky Strike cigarette marketers encouraged female customers to "reach for a Lucky instead of a sweet."

Early weight-loss advocates did promote some less far-fetched programs that survive today, inevitably rechristened with catchy new names. In the mid-1800s, Sylvester Graham (of graham cracker fame), a Presbyterian minister, preached the gospel of eating a bland, meatless diet heavy on whole grains and unleavened bread. It had the added benefit, he claimed, of lowering libido and preventing masturbation. These dubious merits aside, Graham's ideas prefigured modern vegan, vegetarian and low-fat diets, such as those from the American Heart Association, Dean Ornish, MD, and Pritikin.

William Banting, an undertaker for upper-class Londoners (including the royal family) around that same time, was once so fat he could not bend to tie his shoes or, as he put it delicately, "attend to the little offices humanity requires." He lost weight and regained his health by doing exactly the opposite of what Graham prescribed: subsisting on meat and fat and almost no carbohydrates. The Atkins, South Beach, paleo and keto diets can trace their origins to the famous obese British funeral director.

In the late 1800s, Wilbur Olin Atwater, an American chemist who studied metabolism and nutrition, advocated limiting calories to control weight, ushering in the era of the ultra-slender flapper. Although they avoid using the word "calorie," WW International (formerly Weight Watchers), Jenny Craig, Nutrisystem and intermittent-fasting diets are all designed to limit calorie intake.

Secrets of the Slim

I decided to take several modern diets on test drives to see which ones I could stick with—an exercise that took me several years. I cleansed. I became a vegetarian, then a vegan. I joined Weight Watchers. I went gluten-free. I tried Ornish's extremely low-fat meat-free diet, as well as meat-is-just-fine plans like South Beach, Atkins and paleo. But whatever route I took, the results were the same. I slimmed down only to plump back up. Research shows that my experience was pretty typical. In a large long-term study with more than 800 participants, a team led by Frank Sacks, MD, a professor of cardiovascular disease prevention at the Harvard School of Public Health, found that ultimately, the type of diet doesn't matter. Subjects lost and then regained the same amount of weight regardless of which program they chose.

So I began to look at cultures around the world that have no tradition of dieting, where people just eat—and yet are skinnier and healthier than most Americans.

Although they avoid using the word *calorie*, WW, Jenny Craig and Nutrisystem diets are all designed to limit calorie intake.

On the balcony of her country place on the coast not far from Athens, I met up with Antonia Trichopoulou, MD, head of Greece's Hellenic Health Foundation, who has extensively researched the Mediterranean diet. She served me a lunch of eggplant stew and explained that the key to the health benefits of the diet is the liberal use of olive oil in vegetable-forward meals. Oil makes the cuisine filling, and adding plenty of herbs renders it vibrant and exciting. The Greeks have stuck to their diet for thousands of years because eating the Mediterranean way is a pleasure, not an ordeal. That sounded good to me, but I wondered about other blue zones—cultures with remarkable leanness and longevity—that enjoy similar health benefits.

According to numerous studies, if I wanted to live forever, I should move to Loma Linda, California. A sizable percentage of the small city's residents are Seventh-Day Adventists. Research shows that in that group, men live an average of 7.3 years longer than the typical Californian male; women survive 4.4 years longer than their counterparts. Both enjoy a significantly lower risk of obesity. And the city is

awash in centenarians. A big reason, according to Gary Fraser, MD, a distinguished professor at Loma Linda University School of Public Health, is what they eat—or rather, don't eat. For religious reasons, many Adventists follow a vegan diet or a lacto-ovo vegetarian diet, which includes eggs and dairy products but no meat, poultry or seafood. Those who do eat meat do so rarely. They don't snack between meals, drink or smoke, and they get regular—but not necessarily strenuous—exercise. "When you are brought up on a good vegetarian diet by someone who knows how to cook, you really don't miss meat," Fraser told me. When I asked whether I'd have to become an Adventist to enjoy these health benefits, he assured me that if I simply ate like a member of his church, I, too, could enjoy a longer, slimmer life.

Across the Atlantic, however, I encountered a different dietary point of view. I have always envied the French. They get to eat all sorts of cheeses and succulent meats, smothered in rich sauces and enjoyed with great wines, and yet the nation has half the rate of obesity as the U.S., and its people are 65 percent less likely to die of circulatory ailments. It's called the "French paradox."

But when you look at how they eat rather than what they eat there's no paradox at all. In his book *Manger* ("Eating"), Claude Fischler, a sociologist and anthropologist at the French National Center for Scientific Research, compares the attitudes of his countrymen and Americans toward eating. The cultures could hardly be more at odds. The French put quality over quantity. They appreciate the ritual of dining with friends and loved ones. They're mindful about the food they consume and don't snack or eat on the run. We North Americans, on the other hand, are used to giant portions and view the act of eating as something to be conducted as efficiently as possible, whether at our desks, on the subway or in front of the television.

To learn how to eat like the French firsthand, I visited an old acquaintance, chef Jacques Pépin, who moved from France to the U.S. in the 1950s. While the food he cooks these days has been Americanized to a degree, his philosophy on eating remains French. "I always eat with pleasure and no guilt," he explained. Pépin has never dieted in his life. "If I overdo it, I'll cut back for a day or two—but I eat what I would normally eat. I never avoid a specific food," he added. As we sat down and ate together, Pépin had small portions of everything but refrained from seconds. If he had a piece of Comté cheese, it was a morsel. "If you eat slower and eat better, taking the time to taste what you put in your mouth, you eat less and enjoy it more. You get satisfied," he said. "I'll never forget the first time my mother, who loved roast beef, came over to visit. We took her to a restaurant, and when she saw the size of her prime rib, she nearly fell off her chair. She thought it was for the entire table of eight." Delicious food in modest amounts is what Pépin is convinced helps with weight control and overall health.

Not one expert I talked to had anything good to say about added sugar, alcohol or ultra-processed carbohydrates, such as those in white bread and pasta. Of these "usual suspects" are responsible for far more weight gain than their calorie content alone suggests. Super-refined carbs, for example, cause blood sugar levels to spike, triggering a surge in insulin that results in more calories being stored away in fat cells. They are digested so fast that we quickly become hungry again and wind up eating more than we need. They hook us in ways similar to addictive drugs. They lower our metabolism so we burn calories more slowly. And they impair our willpower without us even realizing it.

When I had just about concluded that most weight-loss plans were futile—at least for me—I discovered that, somehow, thousands of Americans have succeeded. The records of their achievements are maintained by the National Weight Control Registry (NWCR), whose 12,000-plus enrollees each lost a minimum of 30 pounds and have kept the weight off for an average of six years.

J. Graham Thomas, PhD, an associate professor of psychiatry and human behavior at Brown University, has been studying members of the registry to find out how they did it. The secret is that there is no secret. Some ate low-fat, some ate low-carb, some ate normally. Half participated in organized weight-loss programs, and half did it on their own. Some lost dozens of pounds simply by switching from regular beer to light. I call it the Frank Sinatra Diet: They did it their way.

That made sense to me. I decided to examine the way I have always eaten and tweak it or,

if need be, hack away at it. That meant eliminating or drastically reducing the "usual suspects" in my diet. From my stint at WW, I knew that sugary foods are a huge contributor to obesity for many. A lot of my fellow WW-ers found that the pounds started falling off once they controlled their sweet tooth. I have whatever the opposite of a sweet tooth is, so sugar wasn't my problem.

On the other hand, I had plenty of weaknesses that were keeping me plump. I love bread, especially the white sourdough variety. So I virtually eliminated it from my diet. For similar reasons, pasta became a rare treat rather than a weeknight standby. Beans, I found, filled the pasta void and also made a satisfying substitution (with fewer calories) in meals that would have once included a slab of meat. I quit alcohol completely because it was easier for me to abstain than to carefully monitor what I drank. And the pounds began disappearing painlessly. Your list of suspects will no doubt be different. But if you find them and attack them, you too could lose weight—your way.

In retrospect, I learned a lot from the diets I unsuccessfully endured. Thanks to Ornish, I added a few tasty vegetarian recipes to my repertoire. South Beach taught me that fiber—lots of it—was a nearly zero-calorie way to feel full and satisfied. For the same reason, I now buy olive oil, a Mediterranean diet cornerstone, in institutional-size bottles and deploy it liberally in vegetable main courses. Keeping track of points at WW showed me that my cheese snacking habit inevitably pushed me over my daily allotment.

On that fateful day at the doctor's office that started me on this journey, I weighed 238 pounds. Now I'm 212. My blood pressure tumbled from an unhealthy 164 over 86 to an ideal 112 over 62. My cholesterol levels are now normal. No one would call me svelte; I'm still very much a work in progress. But as surveys of members of the NWCR show, keeping the pounds off becomes more effortless over time as the habits required to maintain weight become automatic. That strikes me as the opposite of requiring willpower. ●

Reviewed by Victoria Seaver, MS, RD

For the Love of Carbs

The macronutrient has a bad rep as a blood sugar saboteur. But you don't have to (and shouldn't!) ditch carbs altogether. Here are some blood sugar–friendly options.

BY KAREN ANSEL, MS, RDN

When you eat carbs, your body breaks them down into glucose, which enters the bloodstream to provide energy to your muscles, tissues and organs. That's a good thing— glucose is your body's primary source of fuel. But too much glucose in the blood-stream too often can lead to weight gain, insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes, along with a slew of other health conditions. Skip carbs, though, and you miss out on the fiber and nutrients that come along with healthy foods like whole grains, beans, dairy, fruits and vegetables. (Do we need to tell you it's a smart idea to limit the kind from highly processed foods such as white bread, chips and cookies? Didn't think so.) Foods with high-quality carbs—including the ones here—give you the best of both worlds: good nutrition without the blood sugar roller coaster.

BARLEY

This often-overlooked whole grain contains beta-glucan fiber, a secret weapon in the battle against high blood sugar (oats are another great source). During digestion, beta-glucan forms a viscous slurry that slows digestion, says Nicolas Bordenave, PhD, an assistant professor of food biochemistry at the University of Ottawa in Ontario, Canada. As a result, glucose is released gradually, preventing a big spike in blood glucose levels. Go with whole-grain barley when possible, as it's less refined and so is digested more slowly than the pearled kind.

UNSWEETENED PLAIN YOGURT

Research shows that low-fat dairy—and yogurt in particular—may protect against type 2 diabetes. According to a 2019 meta-analysis of 12 studies published in the journal *Advances in Nutrition*, consuming 2 to 7 ounces of yogurt a day reduced the odds of developing the disease by 14 to 26 percent. Experts aren't sure if the lowered risk is because yogurt eaters tend to have healthier diets overall or whether the probiotics in yogurt guard against weight gain that can lead to type 2 diabetes. Either way, a daily serving of unsweetened plain yogurt can't hurt.

BERRIES
Fruit gets called out for its sugar content, but those natural sugars come as part of a healthful package of fiber and antioxidants like anthocyanins. "These plant substances help the body use insulin more efficiently and also slow the rate at which we absorb glucose from food," says Mary Ann Lila, PhD, a professor of food and nutrition sciences at North Carolina State University's Plants for Human Health Institute. Dark red and blue berries are rich in anthocyanins, and they are also higher in fiber than other fruit, making them a great choice for maintaining healthy blood sugar.

LENTILS
Along with fiber and protein, lentils contain a unique carbohydrate called resistant starch (black and pinto beans are also great sources). Because this type of starch is hard to break down, it is not absorbed, explains Alison Duncan, PhD, RD, a professor in the department of health and nutritional services at the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada. "When resistant starch reaches the colon, bacteria there feed on it and produce compounds called short-chain fatty acids," she explains. These compounds are health superstars, improving insulin sensitivity, reducing inflammation and boosting immunity. So load up on those lentils.

SQUASH
When you're keeping an eye on carbs, it's easy to assume starchy veggies such as winter squash are off the menu. Not true. The American Diabetes Association recommends filling a quarter of your plate with high-quality complex carbs like these (the remainder should be a quarter lean protein and half nonstarchy vegetable). What makes pumpkin a good pick? It has fewer carbs than other starchy vegetables, plus it's packed with vitamin A and antioxidants. A half-cup of pureed pumpkin contains only 10 grams of carbohydrates (half as much as sweet potato), plus 3½ grams of glucose-leveling fiber. Got leftover canned pumpkin? Check out page 55 for creative ways to use up every last bit of that nutritious goodness.

THE ANTI-INFLAMMATION ANSWER

Reducing inflammation can be as important to weight loss as diet and activity. These foods do double duty.

CAROLYN WILLIAMS, PHD, RD

Gaining weight, or the inability to shed excess pounds, is often a red flag that there is underlying low-grade inflammation in the body. On the flip side, even the most disciplined eating and exercise habits are often ineffective when inflammation is present. While the dynamic between weight and inflammation is complex, research suggests that reducing inflammation may be as integral to weight loss as diet and activity. The following foods reduce inflammation while supporting healthy weight loss.

Citrus Fruits

Oranges, tangerines, grapefruit and other citrus fruits are packed with soluble fiber, making them a good choice when dieting for satiety and for their low glycemic impact. Choosing fiber-rich foods like citrus may also offer some additional weight-loss perks when it comes to sleep. Research suggests that eating a low-fiber diet is associated with decreased sleep quality. This is important because inadequate sleep triggers changes that can decrease insulin sensitivity and increase appetite and risk of weight gain. So a serving of citrus each day is a low-calorie way to get more fiber as well as load up on the vitamin C, which is an antioxidant that prevents inflammation.

Cauliflower or Broccoli "Rice"

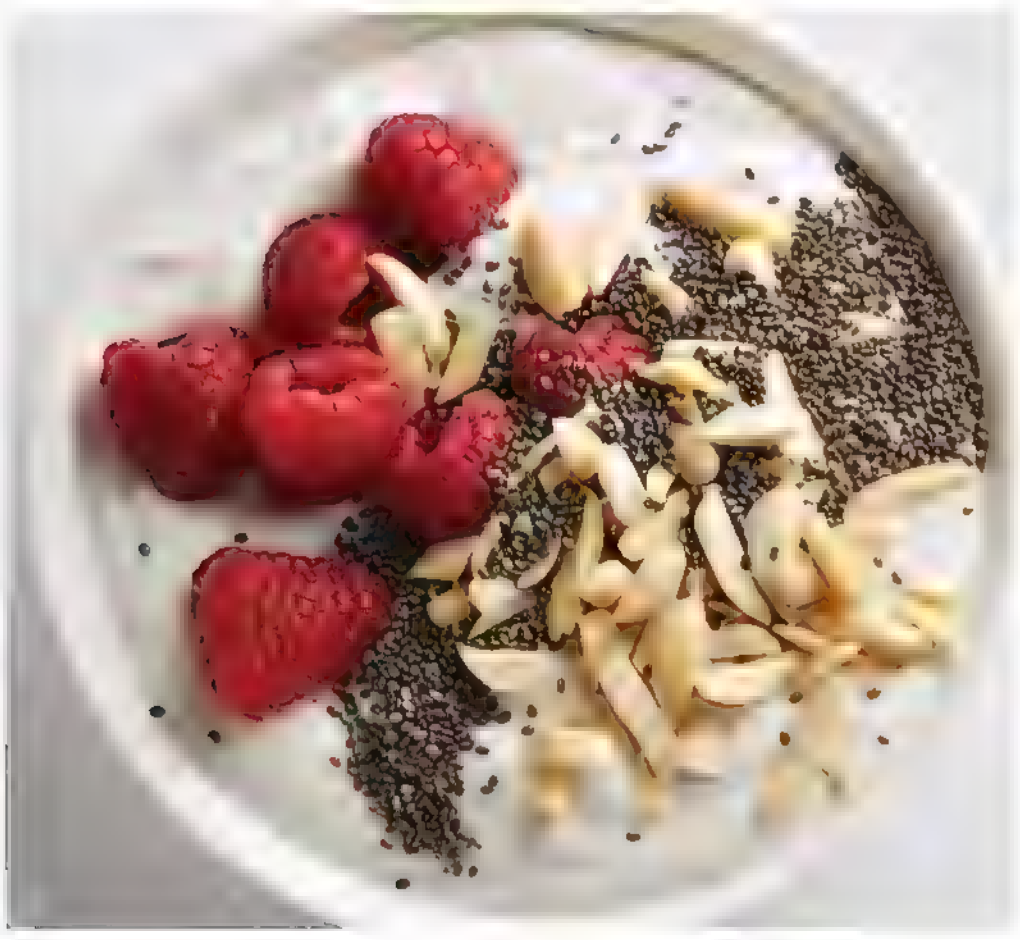
While whole grain foods such as brown rice and whole-wheat pasta have plenty of benefits when it comes to weight loss (namely, lots of good-for-you fiber), swapping out carb-rich foods like pasta and rice for riced cauliflower or broccoli can help cut calories and carbs and also help soothe inflammation.

Citrus-Arugula Salad, recipe
eatingwell.com/citrussalad

When finely chopped, these two low-carb veggies provide a grain-like base for creamy or saucy dishes, or they can be sautéed with other veggies to fill out a nutritious stir-fry. And because cauliflower and broccoli are part of the cruciferous vegetable family, they contain various plant compounds that may have powerful anti-inflammatory effects when consumed regularly.

Walnuts

Eating a combination of fiber, protein and healthy fat at meals and snacks is a game changer when dieting because of the satisfaction this combo provides. And tree nuts like walnuts, almonds and pistachios offer an ideal balance of all three nutrients, including some anti-inflammatory omega-3 fats. While the fat and calories in nuts can add up quickly, a study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* suggests that individuals who eat an ounce of nuts (about a quarter cup) on most days are more likely to be at a healthy body weight and less likely to gain weight, meaning nuts can be a great snack, especially if you're trying to lose weight. The trick is staying on top of portion size.



Strained Yogurt

Good bacteria play a role in the digestion of fiber and fatty acids. Because of this, research suggests that a person's gut health may impact how efficiently their body sheds excess weight. In addition, having a diverse supply of good microbes is helpful when it comes to reducing inflammatory compounds that can lead to insulin resistance and weight gain. This means strengthening the gut's microbe barrier is key for overall health and body weight. One of the best ways to do this is to consume yogurt with live bacteria cultures on a regular basis. Choose strained yogurt, such as Greek-style, for higher levels of protein, and opt for plain instead of flavored to avoid added sugars. Then toss in fresh fruit or nuts for a little sweetness and crunch.

Beans

High-fiber beans and legumes, such as black beans, navy beans, chickpeas, peas and lentils, are good sources of both protein and slow-digesting carbohydrates. This combination offers short-term benefits by leaving the stomach full and preventing sudden glucose spikes, and it also appears to have long-term weight-loss benefits. A 2016 study found that individuals who ate beans and legumes most days lost weight at a slightly higher rate than dieters who didn't consume beans regularly. And from an anti-inflammatory standpoint, beans and legumes are ideal sources of complex carbs, especially when substituted for refined grains and processed starches.

Leafy Greens

Dieting shouldn't leave you feeling empty, and loading up on nonstarchy vegetables like leafy greens is a good way to add more food to your plate without increasing calories or carbs. Aim to get into the habit of including a handful or two of leafy greens like baby spinach, kale, arugula, lettuce and other greens to your plate at most meals, whether it's in the form of a salad or mixed in with other ingredients. A two-cup serving

of a green like baby spinach has just 27 calories and provides 3 grams of fiber, 3 millograms of iron and almost half of your daily vitamin A and C. And in terms of long-term health, leafy greens show some of the strongest research-backed health potential when it comes to reducing inflammation.

Avocado

Fat is an integral nutrient, but figuring out how to incorporate oils and healthy fats when dieting can be a little daunting. Consider the avocado. Not only is this creamy fruit full of monounsaturated fats, vitamin E, fiber and carotenoids—which collectively work together to soothe inflammation in the body—but research suggests that people who eat avocado daily tend to have a lower body weight and lower body mass index than those who rarely ate avocado or consumed it much less frequently.

Extra-Virgin Olive Oil

Another good choice for getting those healthy fats is extra-virgin olive oil. All fats and oils have approximately the same calories and fat per tablespoon, but olive oil is a good source of those healthier unsaturated fats and contains a unique compound called oleocanthal, which has anti-inflammatory effects in the body. All olive oils contain oleocanthal, but less-refined types such as extra virgin have higher levels, so make it your go-to for salad dressings and cooking at a lower heat.

Garlic and Spices

It's easy to stick with healthy eating when you really love the food you're choosing, so don't be afraid to pump up the flavor of your dishes and try new-to-you seasonings. By incorporating garlic and spices like turmeric, rosemary, cinnamon, cumin and ginger, you can prevent meal fatigue as well as calm inflammation. While fragrant spices and pungent garlic may seem like they have the potential to aggravate inflammation, research suggests that they actually do the opposite. In fact, their fragrant compounds have been used medically in other cultures for years for their anti-inflammatory effects. ●

SIMPLIFYING SUGAR

Curbing your sweet tooth can have health benefits—and so can avoiding some of the sneaky added sources in your diet.

BY RACHAEL MOELLER GORMAN

Human beings are primed to seek sweetness. To our ancestors, a sugary taste meant safe, calorie-dense food that their bodies could store as fat for later on, when the honey was gone and fruit was out of season. (Bitter flavors, by contrast, indicated that a plant might be poisonous, and sour ones signaled precious calories had spoiled.) Throughout evolution, our taste buds have been our foodie guides, ushering us toward healthy calories and away from things that could be dangerous.

But sweet, plentiful calories are no longer rare, and the helpful direction of our taste buds has become outdated. Added sugar has snuck into all sorts of sweet and savory foods, from sandwich bread to frozen dinners. And we're eating a whole lot of it: Americans currently get 13 percent of their total daily calories from ingredients like table sugar, high-fructose corn syrup, honey and other added sweeteners. That's about 17 teaspoons' worth, or 68 grams. (Natural

sugars found in fruits, vegetables and dairy products are not considered added. Plus, these foods come with other nutrients that make them healthy. (See "Sugar 101.") The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend limiting added sugars to less than 10 percent of the calories we consume each day, or about 12 teaspoons (48 grams) for a 2,000-calorie diet. But many experts say we should probably eat even less to reduce our risk for health conditions linked to excess sugar consumption, such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cavities.

Our collective sweet tooth has made sugar something of a nutritional pariah. A 2021 International Food Information Council poll of more than 1,000 Americans found that 72 percent of adults are trying to limit or avoid added sugars in their diet. And according to the research group NPD, the first piece of information people look at on the Nutrition Facts panel is sugar, followed by calories.

The protein, fat and fiber in whole foods help blunt the potentially negative effects of natural sugars and offer perks of their own, such as boosting satiety.

That panel could indeed be useful in helping people cut back, which could make a dent in chronic conditions such as heart disease and diabetes, says Renata Micha, RD, PhD, an associate professor of human nutrition at the University of Thessaly in Greece. According to research she conducted at Tufts University on the link between added sugar intake, body mass index and various health outcomes, an estimated 354,400 cases of cardiovascular disease and 599,300 cases of type 2 diabetes could be prevented between 2018 and 2037 in the U.S. alone by providing added sugar information to consumers.

Disclosing added sugar could also result in an estimated net savings of $31 billion in health care costs over the same period. The reason: People will read labels and choose lower-sugar options, and if demand prompts food companies to cut the amount of sugar in their products, the reduction in disease and healthcare costs would be even greater. In fact, many manufacturers have already reformulated their products in anticipation of the new labeling requirements. "It can be a very powerful tool, because it educates the consumer," says Micha. "And food companies need to be able to provide that option to them."

Sugar 101

Sugar is a simple carbohydrate, and there are many different types. For example, glucose (a primary component in honey) and fructose (found in fruits and root veggies) are monosaccharides, which can't be broken down into smaller sugar molecules. Lactose (in dairy products) and sucrose (white sugar) are disaccharides, meaning they're composed of two monosaccharides linked together. High fructose corn syrup (HFCS), added to all sorts of processed foods, is also made of two monosaccharides, fructose and glucose, but they aren't chemically bonded and so don't need to be broken down during digestion—one reason HFCS may get absorbed into the bloodstream more readily. Many foods contain more than one kind of sugar.

Your cells normally run on glucose. When you eat a dessert or another food with sugars in it, enzymes in the digestive process break them apart—sucrose, for instance, becomes glucose and fructose—and the monosaccharides enter your bloodstream. The pancreas senses blood sugar levels rising and releases insulin, signaling your cells to take up that glucose for energy and causing blood sugar levels to drop back down. Frequent shots of glucose into the bloodstream from sugary beverages and foods (particularly ultra-processed ones) cause blood sugar levels to shoot up quickly and then plummet, which can lead to weight gain, type 2 diabetes and other health issues.

Fructose, on the other hand, is processed mostly in the liver. When this organ receives excess fructose, like from the HFCS in soda, it uses it to make fat. In excess, this can cause nonalcoholic fatty liver disease, resulting in inflammation and cirrhosis. Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease affects up to 24 percent of all adults in the U.S.

But sugars found naturally in whole foods—such as the fructose in fruit or lactose in milk—enter your bloodstream much more slowly because they move through your system within a so-called food matrix, surrounded by fiber, fat and/or protein. (The same goes for foods with added sugars, like 100 percent whole-wheat bread.) As a result, you get a flatter

blood sugar curve that steadily powers your cells without taxing your body, says Purdue University nutrition researcher and *EatingWell* advisory board member Richard Mattes, PhD, MPH, RD. In other words, the protein, fat and fiber in whole foods help blunt the potentially negative effects of natural sugars—and offer perks of their own, such as boosting satiety and providing vitamins and antioxidants. This isn't true of produce-based items that lack a food matrix, like 100 percent fruit juice—in this case, the fiber has been stripped out. While juice does supply vitamins and antioxidants, Mattes says, your body will treat its natural sugars the same way it does the added ones in a Big Gulp.

The Debate over the Guidelines

The recently updated Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020–2025, upheld the same advice on added sugars as the 2015–2020 edition, and that the World Health Organization gave even earlier. "The World Health Organization recommended added sugars contribute no more than 10 percent of the calories in your daily diet, based on research on the link between sugar and dental caries, and this later became a guideline for weight management as well," says Mattes, who was a member of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee's Beverages and Added Sugars Subcommittee. At the time, tooth decay was the primary health consideration—not other negative outcomes, such as type 2 diabetes.

The Added Sugars Subcommittee investigated all the research and advised limiting added sugars to only 6 percent of daily calories. Why? For starters, added sugars provide calories but often no nutritional value—which is important, as more than 42 percent of American adults are obese. And by the experts' estimates, after a person consumes the nutrients they need from healthy foods, just 15 percent of daily calories are left over. They then divided these "discretionary calories" between added sugars and solid fats like butter, based on typical American consumption patterns. And voilà: 6 percent of calories were allotted to added sugars and 9 percent to solid fats. But the United States Department of Agriculture and Department of Health and Human Services—which ultimately set the Dietary Guidelines for Americans—decided to stick with the higher 10 percent number.

Mattes points out that because there's no physiological need for added sugar, "the members of my committee still believe that 6 percent is the better target. It sends a stronger message to the public that reducing added sugars would be a healthful decision." The American Heart Association also recommends limiting added sugars to about 6 percent, or no more than 25 grams a day for women and 36 grams for men. However, because Americans already get about 13 percent of their daily calories from added sugar (about 68 grams), many experts note that any reduction is important. ●

Reviewed by Jessica Ball, MS, RD

The Benefits of Cutting Back

Here's what you stand to gain by reducing your sugar intake.

WEIGHT LOSS
An analysis of dozens of trials and observational studies published in *BMJ* showed that reducing added sugar in the diet—by anywhere from 10 to 71 grams a day—decreased body weight (as long as those calories weren't replaced with others). Participants dropped an average of almost two pounds without changing anything else about their eating habits. In two other studies lasting 10 weeks and six months, subjects who consumed between 87 and 105 grams more added sugar daily gained six pounds on average. The researchers point out that there's probably nothing special about the effect of added sugars on body weight. It just comes down to excess calories—although the less-satiating nature of simple carbs may also play a role.

BETTER HEART HEALTH
Some observational studies have shown that people who overconsume added sugar are at a greater risk of developing cardiovascular disease, independent of other risk factors like weight. And a key prospective cohort study of 31,147 American adults published in *JAMA Internal Medicine* found that people who consumed between 10 and 24 percent of their daily calories as added sugar (50 to 120 grams) were 30 percent more likely to die from heart disease than those who consumed less than 10 percent. A high-sugar diet may raise blood pressure, increase inflammation and cause the liver to pump harmful fats into the bloodstream—all of which can contribute to the development of heart disease.

FEWER CAVITIES
You've heard it since you were a kid: Sugar causes tooth decay. And studies have repeatedly proven it. The bacteria on your teeth metabolize sugar, producing an acid that takes minerals out of the enamel and can eventually create a hole. There's evidence that consuming less than 50 grams daily of added sugar is associated with far fewer cavities. And if you eat under 25 grams, the number drops even more dramatically.

HEALTHY AGING
Chronic low-grade inflammation has been linked to nearly every major disease of lifestyle and aging, including arthritis, G.I. disorders and metabolic syndrome. Studies in mice have found that high sugar intake changes the balance of bacteria in the gut, increasing the type with pro-inflammatory properties. The evidence in humans is sparse and still emerging, but a 2018 systematic review of 13 studies with more than 1,100 participants showed that all types of added sugars (fructose, sucrose, glucose, HFCS) ratcheted up levels of C-reactive protein—a key marker of inflammation.

A SHARPER MEMORY
In a 2020 cross-sectional study of 3,623 Americans 60 and older published in the journal *Nutrients,* researchers found an association between high sugar intake and the presence and severity of memory impairment. (A similar link was also established with diets high in total fat and carbohydrates.) Some research suggests this could be because of elevated inflammation in the brain, leading to memory problems in the hippocampus. Type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease—two conditions sugar has also been linked to—have been tied to cognitive decline.

REDUCED RISK OF TYPE 2 DIABETES
Studies have shown that high sugar consumption—especially of sweetened beverages—can increase the odds of developing the disease. Scientists explain this in large part by the weight that people gain when they consume lots of calories in the form of nutritionally empty sugar. Being overweight or obese is often accompanied by problems with blood sugar control and reduced sensitivity to insulin that leads to type 2 diabetes. There's also evidence that many years of sharp rises and falls in blood glucose levels—hallmarks of a sugary diet—can make you more likely to get the disease, says Jason Ewoldt, RDN, LD, a wellness dietitian at the Mayo Clinic Healthy Living Program. But the reverse is also true. In three large prospective observational studies of almost 200,000 American men and women published in the journal *Diabetes Care,* researchers found that people who replaced one daily sugary beverage or fruit juice with water or another type of unsweetened drink had up to a 10 percent lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes later in life.

The Dangers of Speedy Weight Loss

Is losing weight quickly sustainable—or safe? Taking the fast track to slimming down could damage your health.

BY GABY McPHERSON, MS, RDN, LDN

Quick weight loss is often sought after in our society, but it isn't wise. In fact, it could even be bad for you.

Commercials disrupt your video streams to push fat-burning diet programs, and social media ads flood your news feeds with pills, powders and teas promising split-second weight loss. You watch celebrities sashay across the red carpet after dropping 13 pounds in two weeks and click to find out influencers' best-kept weight-loss secrets. It's no wonder many people feel pressure to lose weight swiftly. According to a 2017 article from Michigan Medicine, the academic medical center of the University of Michigan, about 90 percent of people who lose weight fast end up regaining it after all their hard work.

You can get a lot of things quickly. You can binge-watch entire seasons of your favorite shows, order a hot meal to your doorstep within the hour or have items shipped to your home in a jiff. With instant gratification within such easy reach, it makes sense that you'd also expect a way to drop a pants size in a day.

There's nothing wrong with wanting to reduce your weight, but it's crucial to your health that you do it safely. So what happens to your body when you lose weight too fast?

YOU'RE LIKELY TO LOSE MUSCLE

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the top two strategies adults choose when they want to lose weight are eating less and

exercising more. These popular strategies create a calorie deficit, the driver of weight loss. Faced with a calorie deficit, your body switches gears and gets into breakdown mode, looking for different tissues to break down. It can break down fat tissue, but it can also break down muscle tissue, which may be more than you bargained for, per a 2018 report in the journal *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise.*

"When you lose weight too quickly, much of this weight loss is muscle and water weight, not fat," says Melissa Mitri, RD, a registered dietitian and owner of Melissa Mitri Nutrition. Muscle loss impacts much more than your ability to lift heavy things and maintain proper balance. It can be problematic to many parts of your body that use muscle to function, like your heart pumping blood to your organs or your lungs expanding in order to breathe.

Muscle loss also causes weakness, making you more prone to injury. "One study showed losing weight quickly can result in up to six times more muscle loss than a more gradual weight loss plan," Mitri says. The study she refers to was published in 2016 in *Obesity.*

Preserve your muscle, strength and health by treating your weight loss as a journey, not a sprint.

YOU MAY MISS OUT ON CRITICAL NUTRIENTS

A 2018 study published in *Nutrients* that analyzed the nutrient profiles of three commercial diets found deficits in vitamin D, B_{12} and calcium compared to recommendations. Nutrient deficiencies can lead to hair loss, anemia, fatigue and weak bones. With the typical western diet, meeting the recommended dietary guidelines is challenging even when you're not pursuing weight loss.

Eating a variety of nutrient-rich foods, especially many plant-based foods, offers your body balanced nutrition from many sources.

YOU MIGHT EXHAUST YOUR ENERGY

With hopes to meet their weight-loss goals in the short term, many people may seriously restrict calories. "Our bodies are likely to not get enough energy and, as a result, feel fatigued and lethargic," says dietitian Colleen Christensen, RD. "If you're active, your workouts may suffer due to lack of fuel."

A 2020 review of 14 studies published in *Nutrients* evaluated the effects of rapid weight loss on athletes. The authors found that fatigue significantly increased due to quick declines in weight. The review also suggested a possible link between quick weight loss and dehydration, which can cause mental fatigue. You can function at your best when you take steps that preserve and fuel your energy through healthy eating for gradual weight loss.

YOU MAY HARM YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Obsession over the scale, fear of body fat and pressure to be a certain size can be detrimental to your mental health and potentially create an unhealthy relationship with food and resentment of your body. When the weight creeps back up again, you may experience feelings of failure, shame, guilt or low self-esteem. Rapid weight loss can affect your social life too, making it difficult to connect with others. "When attempting to lose weight too quickly, you may find yourself isolating from social interactions, as well as feeling anxious around certain foods," says Maddie Alfiero, RD, a dietitian and owner of Osea Nutrition. Christensen says, "The reality is we can't necessarily say exactly what weight we want to be, similar to how we can't pick our shoe size or our height. My advice is not to focus on weight but on how you feel." ●

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CALCULATING YOUR METABOLIC RATE GIVES YOU AN IDEA OF YOUR ENERGY NEEDS.

METABOLISM MATTERS

Here's the science behind how your body burns calories, and what does—and doesn't—speed up the process.

BY BARBARA BRODY

Everyone has that lanky friend who still slides easily into the jeans she wore in high school—even though she's in her 40s and has been pregnant three times. You, on the other hand, can't even look at a piece of cake without going up a pants size. It's your slow metabolism, right?

Maybe not. The truth is that metabolism has less to do with your weight than you might imagine. In fact, most people have no clue what the term even means, says metabolism researcher Herman Pontzer, PhD, an associate professor of evolutionary anthropology and global health at Duke University and the author of *Burn*.

You probably think of metabolism as how quickly your body burns calories, but technically it's much more than that. "Metabolism refers to a range of biological processes taking place within your body's cells and how many calories it takes to do that work," Pontzer explains. In other words, it's the total amount of energy your body requires for doing everything from making hormones and pumping blood to breathing and thinking. And whether you're worried about being able to power your basic bodily functions (unlikely) or are more concerned about how your clothes fit, that total breaks down into three categories: your resting metabolic rate, the thermic effect of food and the thermic effect of physical activity.

First up is resting metabolic rate, which accounts for a whopping 60 to 75 percent of your total daily energy expenditure. And it's pretty much what it sounds like: the number of calories your body uses when you're just sitting around doing nothing. Then there's the thermic effect of food, a fancy term for the amount of calories you burn by chewing and

digesting what you eat and absorbing and storing those nutrients. It accounts for about 10 percent of your total daily energy expenditure. (This phenomenon explains why "negative calorie" foods—which contain fewer calories than required to break them down—might exist, though there's no solid proof that munching celery will somehow subtract calories from your body.) Last, there's the thermic effect of physical activity, meaning how much energy you use by being active. That comprises about 15 to 30 percent of the amount of energy you burn through every day—and it includes everything you do, including gym sessions, walking the dog and washing dishes. Seemingly insignificant motions, like typing, tapping your toes and fidgeting, count too.

Each pound of lean muscle you have burns about six calories per day (when you're sedentary) compared with two calories daily for the same amount of fat.

Each of these three components of metabolism plays out differently from person to person, for reasons that are only partially understood. While it's easy to see why a Peloton instructor might burn more calories a day than a computer programmer, there's still quite a lot of variability. All things being equal (age, biological sex, size), research shows that range is plus or minus about 20 percent—meaning you may require 2,400 calories a day to meet your body's energy needs while another person requires 2,800 or just 2,000.

Measuring Metabolism

You can get a rough idea of your resting metabolic rate by breaking out a calculator and using the Mifflin-St Jeor formula. (Go to eatingwell.com/metabolism to figure out how fast yours is.) We say rough because it assumes that biological sex, age, height and weight are the only factors in the equation, which is not accurate. (And, of course, resting metabolic rate is only one of the three parts of metabolism, although it does account for the largest percentage of it.) Things like genetics, the functioning of your thyroid and body composition also play key roles. "Metabolism is largely determined by how heavy you are—more specifically, how much muscle and body fat you have," says Corby Martin, PhD, director of the Ingestive Behavior Laboratory at Pennington Biomedical Research Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, which studies food intake and metabolism to develop novel weight-management strategies. It may seem counterintuitive, but the bigger you are, the more cells your body has to fuel, and the more energy you'll burn. Even the size of your organs matters significantly. Research published in *PLOS One* found that up to 43 percent of the variation in metabolic rate among individuals can be attributed to differences in the size of their kidneys, muscles, brain and liver. Age matters too. As you get up there in years, your cells aren't as metabolically active—though it probably doesn't happen as early as you think it does.

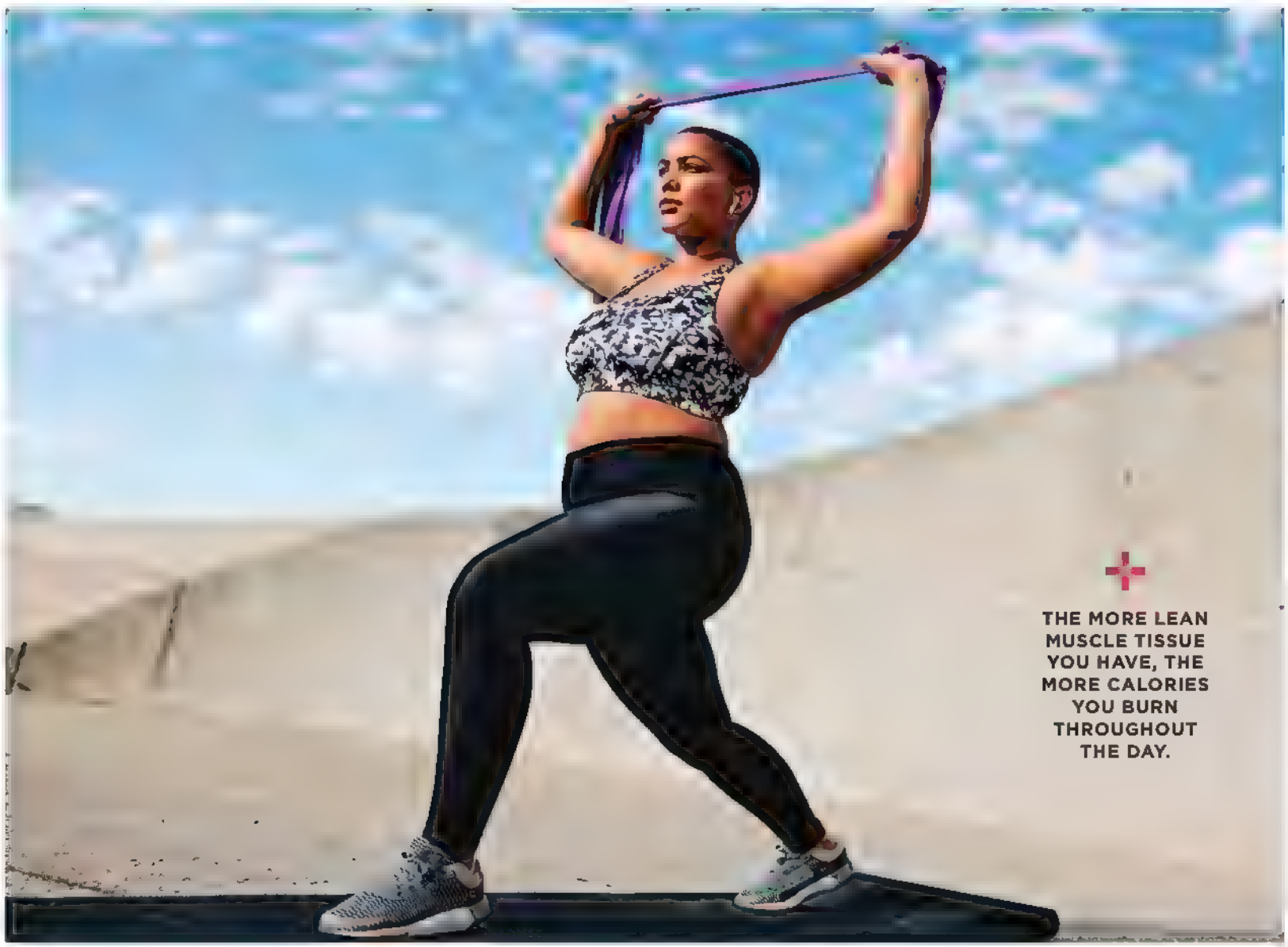
For scientists like Pontzer, the gold standard for measuring total daily energy expenditure—including physical activity and the thermic effect of food in addition to resting metabolic rate—is via the "doubly labeled water" method. Study participants drink water that contains special hydrogen and oxygen isotopes, and researchers then test their urine for up to a week so they can determine how quickly those components are flushed out of their system, which indicates how fast or slow their metabolism is.

Revving the Engine

Chances are you'll never participate in such an experiment, and that's okay. For starters, metabolism is far from the final word when it comes to your weight. If your goal is to shed some pounds rather than overhaul your body's internal furnace, Pontzer says the more effective strategy would be to focus on how to get your diet to match your energy expenditure. Yep, he's talking about the old calories in, calories out math. That said, it is possible to give your metabolism a nudge, namely by strength training. Will it make you drop 25 pounds? No. But it could help peel off extra weight if you're already active and eating a healthy, lower-calorie diet.

Muscling Up

If you come back to the three components of metabolism—resting metabolic rate, the thermic effect of food and physical activity—it's pretty clear that you have the most control over the third piece of that pie. Remember: It accounts for 15 to 30 percent of



total energy expenditure. While any kind of movement you do increases your calorie burn, strength training has been shown to be especially helpful because it builds muscle—important because muscle requires more calories than fat just to maintain its presence on your body. Each pound of lean muscle you have burns about six calories per day (when you're sedentary) compared with two calories daily for the same amount of fat. To give you an idea of how that can add up, the average adult carries somewhere between 46 and 73 pounds of muscle (it ranges due to factors like size and age).

"It's the most metabolically active tissue in the body, so increasing muscle mass via resistance training will increase a person's resting metabolic rate," says Len Kravitz, PhD, a researcher and professor of exercise science at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. "However, it's a mild increase, because resting metabolic rate is multifactorial." A study published in the *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* determined that nine months of resistance training three times a week upped participants' muscle mass by nearly four pounds and increased resting metabolic rate by around 5 percent among people who were active but had not lifted weights for a year prior to the trial. But the researchers noted that there was "wide variability between individuals." And a recent meta-analysis published in the *Journal of Sports Sciences* found that people who engaged in strength training had a resting metabolic rate that was 96 calories per day higher compared to controls—an average taken from the findings of 18 earlier studies. The takeaway: Whether you get a big bump or a more modest one, there are so many other benefits to building strong muscles, like more resilient bones and a reduced risk of injury, that it's worth fitting in strength sessions—lifting weights, taking a conditioning class, doing power yoga, you choose—several times a week.

The Food Factor

You've probably seen a million stories on foods that supposedly stoke your metabolism. And although there is some science to back them up, many experts,

including Pontzer, don't believe dietary tweaks have any impact. Yet others, like Mercedes Carnethon, PhD, vice chair of the department of preventive medicine at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago, are more optimistic. She points to research—albeit mostly from small, preliminary studies—that suggests some foods can give your metabolism a kick, though she notes that they won't "overcome a plate of nachos consumed at midnight." Chief among them: upping your protein consumption, assuming you're currently falling short, as many older adults are. That's because the thermic effect of digesting protein is much higher than that of fat or carbs. "An estimated 25 to 30 percent of the calories consumed in protein are used to break down and process it," says Lyssie Lakatos, RDN, CDN, CFT, a dietitian, personal trainer and coauthor of *Fire Up Your Metabolism*. Multiply your weight in pounds by 0.36 to get the number of grams of protein you should aim for.

Research has also found that capsaicin (the compound that makes hot peppers hot) can give your metabolism a temporary boost. The catch is that most studies on the topic have been small or were done only on animals. (Diet trials are hard to do well because the way to get the highest-quality evidence is to closely control every aspect of the subjects' diet. That's easy to do with mice—not so easy with humans.) Plus, the added calorie burn isn't exactly impressive. For instance, one study found that people who ate 1 gram of red cayenne pepper (about ¼ teaspoon dried) burned about 10 extra calories over the next four hours.

Capsaicin appears to work—at least a little—by heating you up from the inside, says Lakatos. (As body temperature rises, so does metabolism.) It might also help by increasing the amount of so-called brown fat in your body, or making the brown fat you already have more active so it burns more calories. This type of fat sits primarily in your neck and contains far more mitochondria—the energy powerhouses of cells—than white fat.

Then there's caffeine. While you don't want to go overboard—no one needs jitters or insomnia—this pick-me-up does seem to increase metabolism in a few ways. First, it's a stimulant, so it literally revs up energy use. It might also help by increasing the metabolic activity of brown fat, according to a small 2019 study out of the University of Nottingham, a public research institution in England. Studies have shown that caffeine can increase your resting metabolic rate by anywhere from 3 to 11 percent. In one trial, adults who consumed 100 milligrams of caffeine (roughly the amount in an 8-ounce cup of coffee) several times a day burned an extra 79 to 150 calories. But other research suggests that to get the most benefit, you'd have to slug way more java than that. (Not a great idea.)

Lakatos is also a fan of green tea. It has less caffeine than coffee; however, it also contains an antioxidant called EGCG, which appears to increase brown fat. "Think of all these foods as bonuses," says Lakatos. "They're not going to make a major difference, but little things can add up." ●

Reviewed by Jessica Ball, MS, RD

Beyond BMI

This simple number has had an impact on so many of us, but it might not actually be a good indicator of health.

BY DONAVYN COFFEY

Body mass index (BMI) has long been foundational in healthcare around the world. The simple equation of weight relative to height has been used to determine your risk for certain diseases, your insurance premium and even whether or not you qualify for certain medical procedures.

But researchers have been questioning the value of BMI in individual health assessment for a while now—and more recently, body-positivity advocates have called out its contributing role in weight bias and racism in health care, which has more people than ever asking: Should we be using BMI at all?

This formula—used as a proxy for body fat—was never intended to measure individual health. It was developed in the early 1800s to study weight variations across entire populations. "BMI is a rigid number based on old data," says Fatima Stanford, MD, an obesity physician at Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School.

And it's far from perfect in terms of the cutoffs designed to indicate risk, adds Diana Thomas, PhD, a professor of mathematics and an obesity researcher at the United States Military Academy at West Point. A study published in the *International Journal of Obesity* estimated that more than 74 million American adults were miscategorized as unhealthy or healthy based on their BMI alone. Nearly half of people considered overweight and 29 percent categorized as obese were metabolically healthy—their blood pressure, cholesterol and blood glucose were all normal. Thirty percent of those considered to be at a normal weight had metabolic or heart issues.

Part of the problem is that BMI doesn't differentiate between weight from fat and muscle. So bodybuilders and elite athletes with high muscle mass may be categorized as overweight or obese. And even among people who do have higher body fat, BMI doesn't tell physicians anything about how the fat is distributed—a key connection to disease risk. Subcutaneous fat around the hips, thighs and buttocks is not as dangerous or as tightly linked to conditions like heart disease and type 2 diabetes as is visceral fat located in the abdomen.

Furthermore, BMI cutoffs are largely based on data from Western populations—and predominantly Caucasian males—making it problematic to apply this measurement to the diverse U.S. population. There's growing evidence that body composition varies between races and ethnicities. African Americans, for example, are likely to carry more subcutaneous fat than their white counterparts, who tend to have more visceral fat, Dr. Stanford says.

A study published in the journal *Obesity* showed that for Black adults in the U.S., having a higher BMI (25 and over) did not carry the same risk of death as it did in white adults. And there's research showing that people of Asian descent tend to have more body fat—and particularly visceral fat—compared with other racial and ethnic groups with the same BMI, putting them at an increased risk of type 2 diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular disease at a lower BMI. Some experts argue that the BMI cutoff for normal weight in Asian and South Asian groups should be set as low as 22, says Thomas.

Regardless of the BMI category you fall into, it's important to find a healthcare provider who will look beyond that number to get a holistic picture of your health. Because despite the view that people with a higher BMI have a greater risk for a number of diseases than thinner people, the research shows it's not that simple.

Reviewed by Jessica Ball, MS, RD

CHAPTER 2

HEALTHY AND FIT

While eating nutrient-dense and lower-calorie foods is necessary for weight loss, healthy lifestyle choices can give your journey a boost.

THE FITNESS CONNECTION

Exercise can be a key component to weight loss, but new research underscores why it is only a part—and not the most important part—of the solution.

BY DEANNA PAI

There are countless myths about weight loss: Fats are bad, skipping breakfast is good, avoid carbs at all costs. While many have been debunked over the years, one fallacy that persists—despite ample research showing otherwise—is that exercise leads directly to losing weight.

If that's a surprise to you, you're not alone. It's a common line of thinking that stems from the belief that calories in should equal calories out—that is, the amount of calories you eat should be the same as the calories you burn via exercise, which would presumably keep your weight stable. As it turns out, the human body is a little more complicated than that.

"The simple math of 'calories in, calories out' is a bit of a disservice when we're setting expectations for weight loss," says Heather Milton, a board-certified clinical exercise physiologist at New York University's Langone Health. "Even when we know we're giving the most appropriate diet and exercise to somebody for weight loss, we still can't predict the rate of weight loss that they're going to have, because every body is different."

That lack of predictability is supported by research. "Every study published on exercise and weight loss shows tremendous individual variability in weight change, ranging from weight loss to weight gain," says Glenn Gaesser, PhD, an exercise physiologist at Arizona State University. That goes for everyone—men, women, lean, overweight, obese—for reasons that are unclear even to the experts. "This probably explains, in part, why so many people just don't stick with exercise routines," Gaesser says.

One potential factor might be the body itself. In

GO FOR AN ALL-OUT SPRINT AND THEN A JOG TO UP THE INTENSITY OF YOUR RUN.

a landmark study published in 2015, anthropologists from Hunter College in New York City discovered that the Hadza people of Tanzania—who maintain a hunter-gatherer lifestyle—had similar rates of total energy expenditure, or calories burned in a day, as their counterparts in industrialized nations. These findings implied that the body has found ways to compensate for its daily caloric burn in the event of increased physical activity by lowering its calorie spend on other internal activities, so it largely nets out to the same for everyone.

With this in mind, physical activity doesn't seem so important—for weight loss, at least. So why bother breaking a sweat? "Exercise is one of the single most impactful behaviors on literally every aspect of your health," says Audra Wilson, RD, LDN, a bariatric dietitian at Northwestern Medicine in Chicago, who notes that working out also improves sleep, focus and stress levels. In fact, a systematic review of literature on the topic found that while the impact of exercise alone on weight loss is modest at best, it still can reduce blood pressure, blood sugar and high cholesterol—making it a powerful tool for health.

Exercise in combination with diet is a different story. To be clear, dieting, or cutting down the 'calories in,' has also been debunked as a singular weight-loss solution, partly because it's unsustainable and partly because restricting calories can sabotage your efforts. "If you're just using diet, you can only cut so many calories before your body starts to slow down in order to conserve energy," Milton points out. When that happens, you lose both fat and muscle mass. As a result, she says, "your metabolism overall slows down to a point where it becomes very hard to manage, with just diet alone, continuous weight loss—or even maintaining weight at that point."

But pairing calorie restriction (within a healthy, reasonable range) with exercise works around this metabolic slowdown, which is why the combination can be so effective for managing weight.

While cardio has a reputation for burning the most calories in one go—for instance, a 30-minute run can burn a few hundred calories, depending on

your intensity and weight—resistance training is the best possible exercise that you can do to keep your body in a calorie-burning mode.

That's because it's all about the muscle. "Muscle is a highly metabolically active, and what that means is you're burning more calories at rest if you have fit muscle, but also more muscle," Milton says. "Per minute, you may burn more calories doing cardiovascular exercise, but in totality, it doesn't necessarily burn more."

Resistance training can also help with body recomposition, which is a little different from weight loss—but still pays off when you look in the mirror. For instance, studies have found that exercise alone can help with reducing visceral fat, which is found deep in the belly, where it wraps around organs and can even influence your hormones. "As muscles get stronger, they tighten up," Wilson says. "They're smaller, and that can definitely improve the composition of your body." In other words, you lose inches, not pounds. (This should also dispel "that persistent, ridiculous myth that women are going to bulk up like a body builder," she adds.)

If you're new to strength or resistance training, Wilson recommends starting with compound exercises in which you use large muscle groups, such as squats with bicep curls or lunges with overhead presses. Body weight exercises also count, including planks and wall push-ups (before graduating to the real thing when you're up for it). In many ways, this is considered functional fitness—which, Wilson explains, entails movements that mirror life's daily activities. You'll find it easier to carry heavy boxes or shovel snow, making these exercises practical in addition to good for your health.

For sheer health purposes, cardio exercises such as jogging, walking and cycling are still important—since, as the phrase implies, they support cardiovascular health. (Ideally, Milton says, the best regimen involves both cardio and resistance training.) In addition, Wilson says, "I recommend something like yoga or Pilates as an accompaniment [to cardio] to work on that flexibility and strengthen the supporting muscles rather than just the large muscle groups."

Another type of activity to consider is NEAT, which stands for Non-Exercise Activity Thermogenesis. "It's not exercise but movement in our day," Wilson says. Walking from the train to your office, moving your legs when you sit and taking the stairs all count. "Those NEAT calories can make up a pretty large percentage of our daily energy expenditure," Wilson says, adding, "Not everybody needs to train for a marathon." It can be especially important for those who can't do traditional exercise for some reason, such as joint pain. In fact, studies have found that low levels of NEAT are associated with obesity, meaning it may play a role in weight gain.

Most important, though, is to find an exercise regimen that you truly enjoy. If nothing makes you feel more miserable than the idea of tricep kickbacks, "weight loss is not going to happen, because you won't adhere to the program," Milton says. "But if you find a happy medium—maybe a group exercise class that involves body weight training and some high-intensity interval training [HIIT] work—then that, potentially, could be much more effective for you because you may enjoy it and do it more often." And, as with most things in life, consistency is key.

"Your metabolism overall slows down to a point where it becomes hard to manage continuous weight loss with just diet alone."

Ultimately, moving the focus away from weight is a good thing, according to researchers. Unless you're severely underweight (with a body mass index under 18.5) or severely obese (BMI over 40), the number on the scale is not a great predictor of your health or your disease risk. "Physical activity, fitness and diet quality are all more important predictors," says Gaesser, who advocates for a weight-neutral approach because of this. "Changes in any one of these can greatly impact health independent of changes in body weight."

So even if exercise alone isn't the end-all, be-all for weight loss, it's still worth prioritizing in your life for all of its other benefits—and, of course, it can still be worth pairing with a healthy diet if you're looking to manage your weight. Because, as Wilson puts it, "the people that are healthiest are those who are the most active." ●

Reviewed by Victoria Seaver, MS, RD

Five Healthy and Effective Exercises

Research has found that these might be the most effective moves for burning calories, even for people with a genetic risk for obesity.

JESSICA BALL, MS, RD

There are so many factors that contribute to the weight, shape and size of a person's body. One of the main things is our genes, which write the code for all our traits. Genes are different from person to person, and our weight set point (the weight range that our body prefers to be in) is no exception. Some of us are genetically predisposed to have a smaller body, and some of us have genes that can put us at higher risk for obesity.

But lifestyle factors are still important for your overall health and can also impact your weight. A study published in *PLOS Genetics* found that there are some exercises that promote weight loss, especially for those with obesity-favoring genes. After looking at 18 different kinds of exercise, they identified five that showed the most benefits. Some of them may surprise you, and the variety may help you find a way of moving you really enjoy.

1. JOGGING

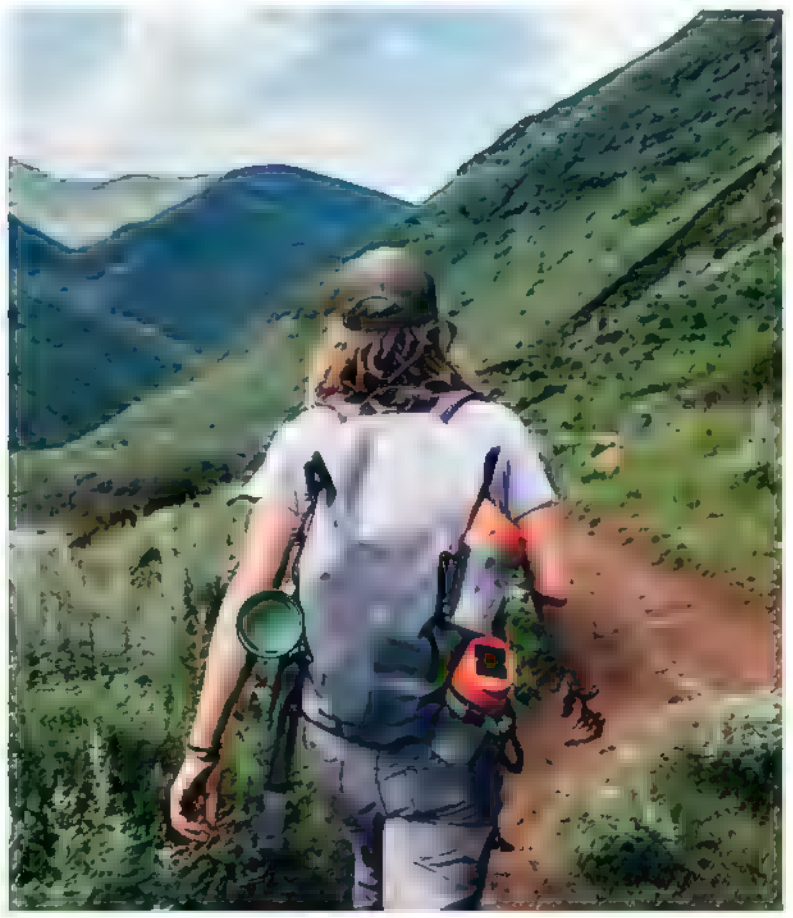
This is probably not a shock to anyone. Regularly jogging for an average of 40 minutes offered the strongest evidence to offset the genetic disposition for obesity. There are a few potential reasons. Regular time outdoors and consistent cardio can reduce stress, along with the obvious calorie burn. The researchers suggested that leisurely jogging had the strongest effect on all of their outcome measures due to the combination of benefits it offers. Look for a park or green space near you, or consider joining a local running group (many cities and sports stores offer them for free) to turn an activity that might seem mundane into more of an adventure.

2. WALKING AND POWER WALKING

Not into running? You can still take advantage of the trails with a brisk walk. Similar to jogging, getting outside to walk can have benefits aside from weight loss. Making the time for a regular stroll can help improve blood sugar levels, prevent heart disease and even improve your fertility. Duration may be key for helping the pounds come off. James O. Hill, PhD, director of the University of Colorado Center for Human Nutrition, recommends one hour of physical activity daily if your goal is weight loss. Though it may take more time than jogging, walking can be worked into your routine in many simple ways. And you don't need an hour all at once. Try a few shorter walks throughout the day or even just parking farther away from the store to get your steps in.

3. HIKING

Enjoy some beautiful views while getting your blood pumping! Researchers have noted that hiking decreases body mass index (BMI), even in people with genes that increase the



risk of obesity. This activity does take up the most time, with the average duration of a hike around two hours. However, hiking is a great adventure for the whole family, and role-modeling exercise is a great way to help your kids develop healthy habits.

4. YOGA

If you're waiting for a reason to practice mindfulness and improve your flexibility, look no further. Along with jogging, yoga decreases multiple measures of obesity and obesity risk factors. The results were especially apparent with longer yoga sessions, around 70 minutes. Similar to many kinds of exercise, there are som e health boosts yoga can provide aside from reducing the number on the scale. Yoga is a natural back pain reliever (key if you're sitting at a desk all day). Regular stretching, even at home, can also help keep your bones strong and prevent osteoporosis. Getting on your mat consistently can help protect your heart, too.

5. DANCING

Yes, you read that right: Dancing can help you lose weight, regardless of your genes. The study was conducted in China and Taiwan, and the style of dance that seemed to have the greatest effect was standard national dancing. It's similar to a structured ballroom dance.

If you aren't much of a ballroom dancer, dance classes like Zumba are great for getting your blood pumping. Or you could bring back a tried-and-true classic: Jazzercise. Don't roll your eyes; it has worked before! Not to mention, it's a surefire way to get yourself into a better mood or squash a creative slump.

THE BOTTOM LINE

As a general rule, try to find physical activity that you can get excited about. If it isn't enjoyable or doesn't suit your lifestyle, it probably won't be something you stick with. These five exercises are great examples of how varied movement can be, but they are not the only options. Also, activity adds up over the day, so try to work in little bouts of movement aside from structured exercise to keep your body happy and healthy. Pro tip: If you are having trouble motivating yourself, consider exercising with a friend. Making exercise a social event can help hold you accountable while giving you an easy excuse for some quality time together. ●

WALKING WORKOUTS

Welcome to your step-by-step plan.

BY LAINEY YOUNKIN, MS, RD, LDN

If you've written off walking as a workout for weight loss, you should reconsider. The old-school advice to burn as many calories as you can during a workout is out. The new science is here: If you want to lose weight and keep it off, burning 500 calories at once on the treadmill is not the best way. Instead, create a small calorie deficit through your diet and increase your activity in a way that's sustainable and doesn't leave you ravenous. Enter: walking.

While it's not as intense as the Peloton or a HIIT workout, research shows that walking is associated with weight loss, fat burn, improved mood and reduced risk of chronic diseases. And the best part is that it's free and can be done anywhere. All you need is a good pair of shoes.

"Walking helps you lose weight by increasing your heart rate and burning calories. If you burn more calories than you consume, [it could] result in weight loss," says Tami Smith, an ACE personal trainer and the owner of Fit Healthy Momma in Williamstown, Massachsetts.

One study found that, compared with women who maintained a sedentary lifestyle, women who walked for 50 to 70 minutes per day three days a week for 12 weeks burned more belly fat. Don't have time to walk for 60 consecutive minutes every day? You might be able to get the same or better results from two shorter walks, according to a 2019 study in the journal *Obesity*. Women who did two 25-minute walks per day six days a week lost more weight and inches than women who did one 50-minute walk per day. Both groups followed the same calorie-controlled diet.

In a study in the *Journal of Nutrition*, one group of men and women followed a calorie-restricted

diet while a second group followed the same diet but also walked 2.5 hours per week. Both groups lost weight, but the walking group lost more body fat compared with the group that followed a calorie-restricted diet without walking.

The most effective, sustainable plan for weight loss is one that combines dietary changes with exercise. But if you feel like you're doing pretty well in the eating department and still aren't getting the results you desire, it may be time to try the simple and free form of exercise known as walking.

How much weight you can lose from walking depends on your current weight, diet and activity level. Dietitians recommend losing no more than one or two pounds per week for sustainable weight loss, which means you could potentially lose 10 pounds in five weeks. However, 10 to 24 weeks is more realistic, since most people don't have hours to devote to walking every day. Plus, a slower rate of weight loss means you can enjoy vacations and holidays and maintain your progress long term.

"Calorie burn from walking depends on several factors, including age, weight, sex, walking pace and difficulty of your walking course," says Alex Davis of wellness and lifestyle coaching service Ryan and Alex Duo Life. "Generally, 1 mile [roughly 2,000 steps] means burning 80 to 100 calories." There are 3,500 calories in a pound. "This means to lose one pound, you'll need to walk roughly 35 miles, or 70,000 steps. Over the course of a week, this means targeting 10,000 steps a day," says Davis. At this rate, you could lose 10 pounds in 10 weeks.

A Walking Plan to Lose 10 Pounds

The best walking plan for you will depend on your fitness level, how much you currently walk and your schedule. If you already walk 10,000 steps a day but aren't losing weight, you likely need to tweak your diet and increase the duration or intensity of your walks. Adding higher-intensity workouts and weight training a few times a week can help too. If you currently walk 15 minutes per day but aren't seeing results, walk for 30 to 60 minutes. If you want to drop 10 pounds faster but don't have an hour to devote to walking every day, walk for 30 minutes at a very brisk pace, and add in some intensity, such as hills or weights.

Here are two five-week walking plans—one for beginners and one for seasoned walkers, those already in the habit of walking every day. After five weeks, increase the duration, frequency and/or intensity of your walks to continue seeing results. Create a calorie deficit through your diet and add strength training two to three times per week to help burn fat while preserving muscle.

Five-Week Beginner Walking Plan

Smith created this five-week walking plan for newbies. "If the person is starting from being sedentary

or from very little structured walking, they will want to start out on the lighter side," she says. "Here's an example of a five-week walking routine progression for someone new to taking dedicated walks for workouts."

WEEK 1: Three 15-minute walks during the week with little to no incline and at a moderate pace of 2–3 mph. This should feel like a leisurely stroll, nothing intense.

WEEK 2: Three 20-minute walks with little to no incline and at a slightly elevated pace of 2.5–3.5 mph. This speed should feel as though you're walking with some urgency, but you're not in a rush.

WEEK 3: Three 30-minute walks with little to no incline and at that same slightly elevated pace (2.5–3.5 mph).

WEEK 4: Four 30-minute walks with some incline or hills added; your speed can stay on the higher end of the 2.5–3.5 mph range. The addition of some incline changes will begin to engage your muscles more and rev your heart rate and calorie burn.

WEEK 5: Five 30-minute walks with incline and hill intervals and at a speed ranging from 3.5–4.5 mph. This should be a purposeful power walk.

Five-Week Intermediate Walking Plan

Brett Durney, cofounder, personal trainer and running coach at Fitness Lab, developed this walking plan best suited for those who already do some walking each day.

"At a high level, I'd always set 10,000 steps as a daily minimum target and often advise that this is broken down into three 20- to 30-minute purposeful walks," he says.

"Ideally I try to get my clients closer to 15,000 steps per day over time and do this by increasing the walk session times by one minute per month over the course of five to six months."

WEEK 1: Three 15-minute walks, achieving roughly 7,500 steps per day.

WEEK 2: Three 16-minute walks, achieving roughly 8,000 steps per day.

WEEK 3: Three 17-minute walks, achieving roughly 8,500 steps per day.

WEEK 4: Three 18-minute walks, achieving roughly 9,000 steps per day.

WEEK 5: Three 20-minute walks, achieving roughly 10,000 steps per day. ●

How to Increase the Burn

While these plans increase walking duration each week, walking 60 minutes per day at a brisk pace only burns 250 to 350 calories. In order to burn more calories each week, dialing up the intensity of these walks can help. Here are four ways you can increase the calorie burn without walking longer.

PICK UP THE PACE

"Walking speed directly affects your calorie burn. Picking up your pace from a stroll to a moderate walk burns 33 percent more calories," says Davis.

FIND HILLS

"Hill walks are great for your muscles. They activate your calf, glute and hamstring muscles even more than a flat walk without any added risk of injury," Alex Davis says. "In addition to increasing your heart rate and workload, hills also increase your calorie burn. On a treadmill, setting an intense incline of 18 percent can increase calorie burn even more."

LISTEN TO UPBEAT MUSIC

"One of my favorite ways to track and increase walking speed is by walking to music," says Davis. "On popular music apps like Spotify, you can even search for playlists that are 100 bpm [beats per minute] to upward of 180 bpm. Each week, try increasing your walking speed by listening to progressively faster songs."

TRY THE RUN-WALK METHOD

"The secret to keep burning calories is to not stop moving while you're doing the exercise," says personal trainer and marathon runner Andrea Chapman. "The run-walk method is a hack to increase the calories you burn in the simplest way. It involves running for a short period of time, without extremely tiring yourself, then taking a 'break' by walking, and repeating this for the rest of the route. This helps you lessen your stress and exhaustion while doing the exercise so you can do the routine for a longer time, burning more of your calories. What's good about this is that it can be done even by beginners, since it takes no complex routine to reach your goal faster."

The Ease of Exercising at Home

One woman doubled how much she could lift in less than one year—for $2 a month.

BY KARLA WALSH

Exercise and I have had quite the long-term relationship. I double majored in magazine journalism and kinesiology in college, my first adult job was at *Fitness* magazine, and I've since earned certifications as a personal trainer and group fitness instructor. All of this was to help inspire others to find non-punishing, healthy and moderate ways to utilize activity after I spent years abusing myself with it. (Burn off every last calorie you eat! "Earn" those charcuterie board snacks by running an extra three miles!) But honestly, I was still overdoing it hardcore with the exercise until a car accident eight years ago shook me up enough to realize that life is too short to spend all of it at war with your body.

Yet the saying "Old habits die hard" is so true, and it still took me about five more years of two-steps-forward, one-step back dances with my exercise relationship status before we made peace. The first time I stepped into a CycleBar cycling studio was the first time in ages that working out truly, honestly, 100 percent felt like fun. It felt like empowerment and strength, and 0 percent anything to do with calories. So I decided to go through "boot camp" and become an instructor, and I did just that from August 2019 until March 2020.

But when the pandemic arrived in Iowa and community spread threatened the well-being of my riders, my passion project lost all of its passion. It was a tough decision, but I chose to step down from teaching to prevent possibly spreading more germs. I knew it was the right thing for me to do to help more of our community be at lower risk. At the same time, I was thinking, "What will I do without my new fitness love?"

As a freelancer working from home —ahem, working from an 780-square-foot apartment—I needed to get creative. Through this recent discovery of a mode of exercise that didn't feel like punishment, I realized that moving my body was actually a huge part of my self-care and stress-relief strategy.

True, I didn't have much in terms of fancy equipment or space. I did, however, have a lot more time, after so many parts of life in 2020 were cancelled (I'm sure you can relate). I also had some willpower, a yoga mat, a computer, and an eight-pound pair of dumbbells. Within days of experimenting with a new routine, I discovered that there were some really tiny-space-friendly, pandemic-approved ways to stay fit.

In mid-March, I began sprinkling in an hour of yoga using the DownDog premium app (available on Google Play and the Apple App Store) to fight off the stir-crazies. I also started doing 45 to 60 minutes of strength training or circuits with Sydney Cummings' free YouTube channel six days each week before I sat down to write. Both resources cost less than $2 per month total. Ten months later, after consistently testing out new flows and diving into Cummings' massive video archives, I've graduated from eight-pound to 15-pound and 22-pound dumbbells on most lifts, have gained about two pounds of muscle, and finally, for the first time in my 33 years on this planet, completed a full strict pull-up.

5 TIPS TO MAKE HOME WORKOUTS WORK FOR YOU

Rather than being something the old me would have fussed about, the extra two pounds of muscle I've gained are a badge of honor, reminding me of that time spent on the mat and with my dumbbells. This new physical and mental strength has made me feel solid as a rock, ready to take on anything this crazy year throws our way next.

Here are five things that helped me make this lifelong goal of feeling ripped a reality.

MAKE IT A HABIT.
Just as you gain strength as you complete repetitions of the same exercise over and over again, exercise can become a habit if you incorporate it into your life often enough. Research shows that about 28 days is the fitness habit-making tipping point for many people. This doesn't mean that you have to sweat at the exact same time or in the exact same way daily, though. Find a

few times of day that might work well for your schedule (say, before the kids wake up in the morning, over lunch, after work but before dinner) and have a couple lighter or shorter options for when you can't go 100 percent.

FIND SOMETHING YOU ACTUALLY ENJOY.
There's no right or wrong way to move your body, and you need not run a 10K or "be an athlete" to be your fittest self. Rather than just picking one thing that your neighbor or some celebrity swears will work and feeling like "I have to exercise," experiment with strength training, Zumba, Pilates, yoga, CrossFit, Peloton, walking . . . anything. Hopefully you'll eventually land on something that inspires you to—at least some days—say, "I want to exercise" or, even better, "I get to exercise."

HAVE A "WHY" THAT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH A NUMBER.
Whether it's a certain number on a scale, dress size or dumbbell pound level to prove progress, these external goals might not actually be your real desired end. Write down how you'd feel if you reached that goal; perhaps it's "empowered," "accomplished" or "strong." Then dive deep: Do you really need that number to feel that way, or is this feeling your real goal? All those number-based signs of progress can be icing on the cake (if they're really meant to happen—not everyone needs to lose inches or pounds!). For me, I know I feel less anxious and more powerful after every workout. Having that carrot at the finish line is a nice nudge on the days I'm not in the mood.

AIM FOR PROGRESS, NOT PERFECTION.
If you miss a workout, screw up a dance step or need to drop down to a lighter set of dumbbells for the day, you're not a failure. Give yourself grace for the time you need to breathe and rebuild, and prepare to come back next time determined to give it your all again.

REWARD YOURSELF.
Most gym memberships cost between $30 and $200 per month depending on where you live and the amenities that are included, and certain pieces of fancy home gym equipment run $2,000. If you're exercising at home, you're already saving a lot! So keep that in mind as you build your home gym and your workout apparel library. If you have the financial means to do so (used equipment is often available on Facebook Marketplace or certain thrift shops), invest a little in what will make you jazzed to sweat and what will help you continue to see progress.

And if you stick with your new habit for a set amount of time, treat yourself to something as a thank you, such as a massage gun or a new pair of sneakers. ●

Reviewed by Victoria Seaver, MS, RD

9 ACTIVITIES THAT BURN CALORIES IN 30-MINUTES

You don't need to hit the gym to work toward a meaningful calorie deficit.

JESSICA BALL, MS, RD

Taking a walk is great for your health. It helps you stay active, it's free and you can do it almost anywhere. For a person who weighs 155 pounds, walking for 30 minutes burns about 149 calories. However, not everyone likes to walk or can walk. Thankfully, there are other activities that burn just as many calories as walking, and they may already be a part of your daily routine.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists the calorie burn for different activities—everything from hiking and running to gardening and dancing. An article published by Harvard Medical School broke out several different types of activities (not just exercise), including those you can do outdoors as well as various indoor household tasks. Here are nine of our favorite ways to burn as many calories as (or even more than!) walking for 30 minutes.

GARDENING

Calories burned in 30 minutes: 167

It's time to get outside and into the dirt. Added bonus: Gardening is a gratifying way to see your work pay off over time. Along with being a good way to get in some movement that doesn't feel like exercise, it's an affordable and sustainable way to put high-quality vegetables on your table. Plus, gardening can build muscle and reduce your risk for chronic illnesses such as heart disease and diabetes.

MOWING THE LAWN

Calories burned in 30 minutes: 167

Unfortunately, riding mowers don't count, but use a push mower and you can up your calorie burn while taking care of your lawn. Makes sense, since you're walking and pushing—but you're also doing double duty and making the yard look nice. The energy you expend mowing is on par with what

it would be while you're playing sports such as volleyball or badminton.

TAI CHI

Calories burned in 30 minutes: 149

Besides being a good way to burn calories, tai chi provides several other potential health benefits. These include a variety of mental health perks, including reduced stress and improved mood, according to research published in *BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine*. Try a tai chi class at your local fitness center or park, or through an online video.

PLAYING WITH KIDS

Calories burned in 30 minutes: 149 to 186

Have kids, grandkids or friends with kids? Spending time playing with little ones is good for them *and* for you. Anyone who's spent the day with kids knows it can be exhausting—but playing along is sneaky exercise (and fun!). Playing at a moderate effort level burns just as many calories as walking. If you're participating in more vigorous games, such as hopscotch or tag, you can burn up to 186 calories per half hour.

PAINTING

Calories burned in 30 minutes: 167 to 186

Painting is one of the cheapest ways to give a house a makeover. Adding a new pop of color to a room burns around 167 calories per half hour; painting outdoors boosts the intensity, averaging closer to 186 calories per half hour. Doing the painting yourself can save you money, too.

CLEANING

Calories burned in 30 minutes: 167

Talk about two birds with one stone. Cleaning the house, a normal part of many people's weekly to-do list, can burn more calories than going for a walk. More involved tasks, like vacuuming, scrubbing the tub or washing the car, understandably burn more calories than lower-lift tasks, such as dusting or cleaning counters.

RAKING LEAVES

Calories burned in 30 minutes: 149

Add this to the list of things you're already doing in the fall and enjoy its calorie-burning bonus. Raking may feel like a chore, but it's a great option for getting outside and enjoying the autumn weather. People tend to rake on one side of their body, which increases the risk of injury, since raking uses the same muscles to do the same movement over and over. To avoid overuse injury, try switching sides every few minutes.

SHOVELING SNOW

Calories burned in 30 minutes: 223

For those of us who live in places with cold winter weather, shoveling snow is inevitable. But it gives you a reason to embrace getting out and moving even when it's cold. Aside from being a good way to stay active in the colder months, clearing your driveway of snow and ice makes it safer for you and your loved ones. Even using a snowblower burns 167 calories in 30 minutes.

COACHING SPORTS

Calories burned in 30 minutes: 149

You don't need to be an athlete to get in on the c alorie burn of sporting events. Coaching a sports team burns around 150 calories per 30 minutes of game time, whether it's from standing on the sidelines or moving around to coordinate with a team. This is also a great way to get involved in sports without being on the field. If you're not used to standing for hours at a time, take breaks to sit down.

THE BOTTOM LINE

This list is just a start. There are many things that burn just as many calories as a walk. When trying to lose or maintain weight and stay healthy, it's important to find ways to add movement into your day. The key to sticking with an exercise routine is finding options you enjoy and that are realistic for your lifestyle. These ideas show that with a little creativity, you can burn calories outside the box of conventional exercise. ●

THE SLEEP SOLUTION

When it comes to losing weight, sleep can be just as important as nutrition. These six changes can make for better sleep and weight loss.

BY CAROLYN WILLIAMS, PHD, RD

Diet and exercise are two key aspects of successful weight loss, but there's another important factor that tends to get neglected: sleep! Adults need an average of seven to nine hours of sleep, yet the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that at least one-third of U.S. adults log less than seven hours nightly.

Getting enough shut-eye matters way beyond being a little tired or less productive; it can affect your weight. Inadequate sleep triggers metabolic and hormonal changes that can increase appetite and cravings and decrease insulin sensitivity. These effects are so significant that inadequate sleep is actually considered a risk factor for weight gain and obesity.

Additionally, a lack of sleep can make it even more difficult to stick to healthy food choices, since mental health, mood and thought patterns are also impacted. So what can you do to make your snoozes longer and more restful? Here

are six small changes to make for better sleep and support healthy weight loss.

1. Hydrate Early in the Day

Keeping the body hydrated is key for weight loss—and apparently also for getting adequate sleep. A 2018 study found that individuals who got six hours of sleep or less were much more likely to be inadequately hydrated compared with those who slept seven to nine hours. However, getting up several times a night to go to the bathroom could disrupt your overall sleep, so how do you hydrate to support weight loss and sleep without a full bladder waking you up during the night?

Determine your daily water goal, then spread those ounces throughout the day. Emphasize getting most of it by midafternoon. To make it easy, I carry a water bottle and aim to consume 75 to 80 percent of my goal by 3 or 4 p.m. This way I get adequate hydration while still allowing my body plenty of time to absorb and excrete it. You can still have more water and other fluids after that time; just don't use the late afternoon and evening hours to get the majority of your daily hydration.

2. Limit Caffeine After Lunch

While I love a cup (or two) of coffee in the morning, I'm careful to avoid caffeine in the late afternoon and evening. I thought this was enough to avoid caffeine-related sleep issues, but that may not be the case. It turns out caffeine can remain in the body for six to nine hours after it's consumed. For those sensitive to caffeine, this can make falling asleep difficult. And even if it doesn't seem to prevent you falling asleep, having remnants of the stimulant in your body can decrease the amount of deep sleep you get. If you regularly consume caffeine, moderate consumption (less than 400 mg a day) in the first half of the day will have little impact, but try to limit intake starting in the early afternoon. Also watch out for any medications or supplements you take in the evening that may contain caffeine.

3. Eat a High-Fiber Diet

Eating high-fiber, less-processed foods is key for weight loss, as well as to prevent most chronic diseases. Plus, it may even help your sleep. While research isn't conclusive, two separate studies found that individuals who ate a low-fiber diet high in sugar and refined carbs were much more likely to experience poor-quality sleep compared with those who ate more fiber and less added sugar. The reason isn't fully understood, although some experts speculate that sleep may be disrupted by a drop in blood sugar, since added sugars and refined, carb-rich foods trigger a larger, quicker reaction in glucose and insulin.

High-fiber, less-processed foods such as fruits,

vegetables, beans and whole grains are what sustainable weight loss programs are centered around, since these foods are high in nutrients while also being lower in calories, added sugars and sodium. You're likely already focusing on these foods if you're trying to lose weight, so use the possible benefit of better sleep as additional motivation to continue to make smart eating choices.

4. Get Moving

Exercise burns calories, but being physically active also helps you sleep better. Though the mechanism isn't fully understood, research suggests that those who get regular exercise—regardless of length or type of activity—sleep longer and get more of the deep, restorative sleep that's essential for health compared with those who are less active.

Burning calories and sleeping better is a double win when trying to lose weight, so establish (and stick with) a regular workout schedule. Aim for at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day, but if you can't squeeze in a trip to the gym, even a short 10-minute walk or workout may result in improved sleep that night.

5. Get Some Sunlight

Do you struggle to fall asleep? Making a point to step outside a few times a day and get a little sunlight may help. The reason has to do with the body's circadian rhythms, which orchestrate and oversee our internal clock and schedule. Light and darkness influence these rhythms, so incorporating brief snippets of sunlight into your day can help remind your body it's time to be awake and alert. The goal is that as the day ends and gets darker, your circadian rhythms will respond by helping your body relax and fall asleep more easily.

Going outside for a two- to three-minute walk cues your body's rhythms to promote sleep later that night when it's dark. If that's not an option, open the blinds or sit by a window, and avoid sitting in the dark for long periods during daytime hours.

6. Skip That Nightly Glass of Wine

Losing weight isn't about deprivation; all foods (and drinks) can fit into a healthy weight loss approach. And if you like to have an occasional alcoholic drink, you're probably already opting for a lower-calorie cocktail like a glass of wine or light beer. However, there's more to know about that drink than just the calorie count.

Even though alcohol is a sedative and can help you initially fall asleep, the aftereffects—even from just one drink—can trigger less-restful sleep a few hours later. In fact, a 2018 study suggests that one to two glasses decreases restorative deep sleep by 24 percent. Less sleep plus dehydration equals a bad combo for weight loss.

It's fine to enjoy a cocktail or two on occasion—just don't make it a nightly habit. Even though you may not feel the effects from one drink per night, the sleep loss slowly adds up. Also, be aware that the more you consume, the more the amount of restful sleep you're getting will decrease. ●

CHAPTER 3

GET COOKING

These delicious recipes are full of the nutrients you need to set yourself on a healthy path to weight management. Plus, a full week of meal plans makes it easy to stay the course.

Crispy Smashed
Brussels Sprouts recipe
at eatingwell.com/
smashedbrussels

SOUTHERN COMFORT

Virginia Willis cooks and eats for a living but lost 65 pounds over two years. Here, she shares her go-to dishes and tips for success.

BY HOLLY PEVZNER

Virginia Willis loves to cook. She's been doing it since she was knee-high to her grandma. Even more, Willis loves to eat. That's not shocking, given that she's a French-trained southern chef who's written eight cookbooks, including the James Beard Award–winning *Lighten Up, Y'all.* "I'm not one of those people who's like, 'Oh, I can't eat that!' I'm like, 'Bring it!'" the 55-year-old says. What is astonishing, however, is that Willis managed to shed roughly 65 pounds over two years—all while testing recipes nearly nonstop and dealing with the breakup of a 10-year relationship, a herniated disc, a big move from Massachusetts back home to Georgia and a global pandemic.

Willis, a self-proclaimed "sturdy woman," wasn't looking to transform into a skinny person. Instead, she wanted her clothes to fit a little better, and

Smothered Chicken Breasts in Onion Gravy

ACTIVE: 25 mins **TOTAL:** 55 mins
SERVINGS: 4

Gravy gets a bad rap because it's often made with fat drippings or served over fried meat, but it's not inherently unhealthy. Using a minimum amount of oil to make the roux reduces calories. The result is good, country-style cooking—always welcome as part of a weight-loss plan.

- 2 tablespoons whole-wheat flour
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- ¾ teaspoon kosher salt, divided
- ¼ teaspoon ground pepper, divided
- 1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts, trimmed
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 3 medium sweet onions, sliced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 cup low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme
- 1 bay leaf

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Stir flour, onion powder, paprika, cayenne, ¼ teaspoon salt and ⅛ teaspoon pepper in a shallow dish. Pat chicken dry and dredge in the flour mixture to coat on both sides. Shake off excess. (Reserve the flour mixture for Step 4.) Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a large ovenproof skillet over medium-high heat. Add the chicken and cook, flipping once, until brown, 1 to 2 minutes per side. Transfer to a plate.
3. Add onions and the remaining 1 tablespoon oil, ½ teaspoon salt and ⅛ teaspoon pepper to the pan. Reduce heat to medium. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions are golden brown, 5 to 7 minutes. Add garlic and cook until fragrant, 45 to 60 seconds.
4. Tip remaining flour mixture into onions and stir to coat. Add broth and increase heat to medium-high. Bring to a boil, stirring often. Adjust heat to maintain simmer. Add the reserved chicken and any accumulated juices, thyme and bay leaf. Nestle the chicken into the onions and turn to coat.
5. Transfer the pan to the oven. Bake until an instant-read thermometer inserted in the thickest part of the chicken registers 165°F, 20 to 25 minutes. Discard the bay leaf.

SERVING SIZE 3 OZ. CHICKEN & ONE CUP GRAVY
PER SERVING· **CALORIES** 311 **PROTEIN** 29G
CARBOHYDRATES 24G **DIETARY FIBER** 3G
TOTAL SUGARS 13G (ADDED 0G) **FAT** 11G (SAT 2G)
CHOLESTEROL 83MG **SODIUM** 450MG **POTASSIUM** 766MG

Chicken Stew with Collard Greens & Peanuts

ACTIVE: 30 mins **TOTAL:** 50 mins
SERVINGS: 4

This West African–inspired chicken stew is hearty and includes lots of bold, umami flavors. Plus, it's packed with so many beneficial ingredients—peanut butter and chicken for protein, nutrient-rich collard greens and colorful vegetables.

- 3 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 tablespoon canola oil
- 12 ounces boneless, skinless chicken thighs, trimmed and cut into 1-inch pieces
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt plus a pinch, divided
- ¼ teaspoon ground pepper
- 1 medium sweet onion, chopped
- 2 medium carrots, diced
- ½ medium red bell pepper or 2 mini bell peppers, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh ginger
- ½ cup crunchy peanut butter
- ½ habanero chile or ¼ jalapeño pepper, seeded and finely chopped
- 1 bay leaf
- ¼ teaspoon ground coriander
- ⅛ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ⅛ teaspoon ground cumin
- 2¼ cups cubed peeled butternut squash
- 2 cups packed sliced collards or other dark leafy greens
- Chopped fresh cilantro and unsalted peanuts for serving

1. Whisk broth and tomato paste in a large measuring cup or bowl until smooth. Set aside.
2. Heat oil in a large pot over medium-high heat. Season chicken with ½ teaspoon salt and pepper. Add to the pot and cook, turning as needed, until browned on all sides, about 5 minutes. Transfer to a plate.
3. Add onion, carrots and bell pepper to the pot; cook, stirring often, until the onion is soft and translucent, 3 to 5 minutes. Add garlic and ginger; cook until fragrant, 45 to 60

seconds. Add the broth mixture, peanut butter, chile pepper, bay leaf, coriander, cinnamon, cumin and the remaining pinch of salt; stir until smooth. Add the chicken and any juices that have accumulated, squash and greens.

4. Reduce heat to medium-low; cover and cook until the vegetables are tender, about 15 minutes. Uncover and cook until the chicken is cooked through and the soup has thickened, about 5 minutes more. Discard the bay leaf. Sprinkle with cilantro and peanuts, if desired.

SERVING SIZE 1¾ CUPS
PER SERVING: **CALORIES** 453 **PROTEIN** 30G **CARBOHYDRATES** 34G **DIETARY FIBER** 7G **TOTAL SUGARS** 12G (ADDED 0G) **FAT** 25G (SAT 4G) **CHOLESTEROL** 80MG **SODIUM** 608MG **POTASSIUM** 1,027MG

she wanted to move a little better. "And honestly, I didn't want to feel ashamed of my size anymore," she says. Those drivers were enough for a while.

The thing is, even at her heaviest, Willis's diet wasn't terrible. She was eating lots of fresh fruits and vegetables and avoiding processed foods. And she was going to the gym. "But I was also drinking and eating too much. I might have been using too much butter and cream, too! But mostly I just wasn't being kind to myself," she says.

Willis lost almost 40 pounds in 2019, thanks to regular workouts and WW-style points counting. (She has never been to a WW meeting, but she has taken a shine to the idea that every food has a number and relies on the WW app. "It makes for super-easy math that helps me stay within my guidelines," she says.) Then, she explains, her motivation began to shift.

In March 2020, a long-scheduled procedure that would have eased Willis's back pain was abruptly canceled due to the pandemic. Her physical therapy facility closed. Her gym did too. Heck, the virus even made it more difficult to get fresh, nutritious food at the grocery store. "With all of this going on, I just kept thinking to myself, *What do I need to do to keep myself healthy?*" she says.

Instead of feeling daunted, Willis rose to the challenge. "I kept a list of anti-inflammatory foods for spine health on my fridge that were really ones I already ate, like red fruits and veggies, soy, flaxseed, nuts, olives—but having that reminder made me more cognizant," she says. She also relegated red meat to a once-a-week (tops) treat and traded most starchy side dishes for veggies. "I didn't have the gym or PT anymore, but I could walk—and boy, did those walks help relieve pandemic stress," says Willis, who still clocks 3½ miles a day with a rotating roster of friends. "Walking has moved far past simple weight loss for me. It's my mental health now." And when morning strolls replace dinner and drinks as one's social lifeline, other things tend to change as well. "I spent much of the pandemic alcohol-free," Willis says. At first, it was because booze and her back meds didn't mix. But all that walking

and produce-eating helped her lose enough weight to be able to ditch the pain medication altogether. "Essentially, I was free to return to more indulgent drinking and eating when I got off the meds, but I didn't want to," Willis says. "I wanted to keep those guardrails and continue to succeed."

And she has. "If you had told me that I would feel this good as a result of losing 65 pounds, I would not have believed you," she says. She no longer needs that spinal procedure. She's can get into child's pose more quickly. And her blood pressure, cholesterol and other numbers are better than they were a decade ago. "That's exciting stuff!" Willis says.

The best part is, she's doing it while eating the foods she loves. "I don't want to have bland chicken or plain celery sticks," she says. "I want delicious food." For instance, she is an unabashed chocolate lover, so when she saw a "diet" dessert recipe that

Gingery Vegetable Broth

ACTIVE: 15 mins **TOTAL:** 1¾ hrs
SERVINGS: 16

To make ahead: Refrigerate for up to 5 days or freeze for up to 6 months.

Equipment: Cheesecloth

Willis saves veggie peels and scraps in a gallon-size bag in her freezer to make this broth. Before she prepares it, she cleans out the produce drawer of limp carrots, shriveled mushrooms and herbs on their way out. (But keep in mind, this is not a garbage bag! If it's too far gone, it belongs in the compost, not the stock pot.) Garlic, ginger and turmeric add great flavor.

- **12 cups washed vegetable and herb trimmings, such as mushrooms, tomatoes, fennel, leeks, bell peppers, romaine ends, butternut squash, kale, chard, thyme, parsley**
- **2 large onions, quartered**
- **2 medium carrots, cut into thirds**
- **2 stalks celery, cut into thirds**
- **1 head garlic, cloves separated and peeled**
- **8–12 slices fresh ginger**
- **8–12 slices fresh turmeric (optional)**
- **2 tablespoons black peppercorns**
- **4 bay leaves**
- **16 cups water**

1. Combine trimmings, onions, carrots, celery, garlic, ginger to taste, turmeric to taste (if using), peppercorns and bay leaves in a large pot. Add water and bring to a boil. Adjust heat to maintain a gentle simmer. Partially cover and simmer, without stirring, until the vegetables are very soft and the liquid is golden brown, about 1½ hours.
2. Line a colander with cheesecloth and place it over a large bowl. Carefully strain the broth, pressing on the solids with the back of a spoon to extract any remaining liquid.

SERVING SIZE 1 CUP
AFTER STRAINING, BROTH HAS NEGLIGIBLE CALORIES AND NUTRIENTS

called for combining fat-free chocolate pudding mix with a can of zero-sugar soda, she frowned. "That's just sad," she says. "When I want an after-dinner treat, I dip slices of honeycrisp apples into a bittersweet chocolate sauce I make."

The secrets to Willis' success are pretty straightforward. She believes in ditching deprivation, exercising daily, keeping an eye on portions and calories, and embracing the notion that one small, healthy behavior leads to another—and another. "The good spreads like a beautiful web," she says. "Hippie-dippie? Maybe. But it's really true!"

Allow Willis to help you expand your web with the doable tips and recipes that continue to work for her today. As down-to-earth as they are, they also happen to be 100 percent backed by science. ●

Reviewed by Jessica Ball, MS, RD

Soup Beans with Cornbread & Kraut

ACTIVE: 25 mins **TOTAL:** 1½ hrs (plus overnight soaking)
SERVINGS: 8

Willis usually makes a pound of beans at a time. The first meal is generally these soup beans with cornbread and fermented cabbage. She uses the rest in salads, mashes them for not-refried beans, adds them to a burrito or eats them as a side dish. Then she freezes what's left in single-cup containers. For a warm kick of spice, she seasons the cornbread with freshly ground black pepper.

BEANS

- **1 pound dried pinto beans, picked over and rinsed, soaked overnight**
- **1 tablespoon canola oil**
- **1 medium onion, chopped**
- **10 cloves garlic, coarsely chopped**
- **8 cups Gingery Vegetable Broth (page 75) or low-sodium chicken broth**
- **2 bay leaves**
- **2 sprigs fresh thyme**
- **1 teaspoon kosher salt**
- **¼ teaspoon ground pepper**
- **1 cup sauerkraut or chowchow for serving**

CORNBREAD

- **1 tablespoon canola oil**
- **1 cup whole-grain cornmeal**
- **½ teaspoon baking soda**
- **½ teaspoon salt**
- **1 large egg, lightly beaten**
- **1 cup buttermilk**
- **⅛ teaspoon ground pepper**

1. To prepare beans: Drain and rinse beans. Heat oil in a large pot over medium heat (or see Tip, below). Add onion and cook until translucent, 3 to 5 minutes. Add garlic and cook until fragrant, 45 to 60 seconds. Add broth, bay leaves, thyme and the beans. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce heat to low, cover and simmer until the beans are tender, 1¼ to 1½ hours. (You want them to remain whole and not be falling apart.) Discard the bay leaves and thyme sprigs. Season with 1 teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper.
2. Meanwhile, prepare cornbread: Preheat oven to 425°F. Add oil to an 8-inch cast-iron skillet and place in the oven for 5 minutes.
3. Combine cornmeal, baking soda and salt in a large bowl. Mix egg and buttermilk in a large measuring cup. Stir the wet ingredients into the dry to combine. Pour the hot oil into the batter and stir to combine, then pour the batter back into the hot skillet. Sprinkle with pepper.
4. Bake the cornbread until golden brown, 12 to 15 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack to cool slightly. Cut into 8 slices.
5. Serve the beans with the cornbread and sauerkraut or chowchow.

SERVING SIZE GENEROUS 1 CUP BEANS, 1 PIECE CORNBREAD & 2 TBSP SAUERKRAUT OR CHOWCHOW
PER SERVING: **CALORIES** 317 **PROTEIN** 16G **CARBOHYDRATES** 53G **DIETARY FIBER** 14G **TOTAL SUGARS** 3G (ADDED 0G) **FAT** 6G (SAT 1G) **CHOLESTEROL** 24MG **SODIUM** 640MG **POTASSIUM** 788MG

Tip: To cook beans in a slow cooker, combine the drained beans, onion, garlic, 5 cups broth (or water), bay leaves and thyme in a 6-quart or larger slow cooker. Cover and cook on low until the beans are tender, about 6 hours. (You want them to remain whole and not be falling apart.) Discard bay leaves and thyme sprigs. Season with 1 teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper.

Small-Batch Crispy Chocolate Chip Cookies

ACTIVE: 10 mins **TOTAL:** 25 mins
SERVINGS: Makes 8 cookies

Willis does not want the enticement of dozens of cookies lying about on the counter or in the freezer. But sometimes she just needs a bite of something sweet and chocolaty. This is her "tablespoon cookie" recipe—she doesn't even bother getting out the measuring cups. And she loves how lacy and thin they are.

- **2 tablespoons unsalted butter, at room temperature**
- **2 tablespoons granulated sugar**
- **2 tablespoons turbinado sugar**
- **1 tablespoon unsweetened applesauce**
- **¼ teaspoon vanilla extract**
- **4 tablespoons white whole-wheat flour**
- **¼ teaspoon baking soda**
- **⅛ teaspoon kosher salt**
- **3 tablespoons dark chocolate chips**

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Line a baking sheet with a nonstick silicone baking mat or parchment paper.
2. Combine butter, granulated sugar and turbinado sugar in a small bowl. Using a rubber spatula, stir until well blended. Add applesauce and vanilla; stir to combine. Add flour, baking soda and salt; stir to combine. Add chocolate chips; stir to combine. Using a tablespoon measure, scoop the dough onto the prepared baking sheet, spacing cookies about 2 inches apart.
3. Bake until the cookies are golden around the edges, about 8 minutes. Let cool on the baking sheet for 5 minutes, then transfer to a rack to cool and firm up, about 10 minutes.

PER COOKIE: **CALORIES** 97 **PROTEIN** 1G **CARBOHYDRATES** 13G **DIETARY FIBER** 1G **TOTAL SUGARS** 9G (ADDED 9G) **FAT** 5G (SAT 3G) **CHOLESTEROL** 8MG **SODIUM** 70MG **POTASSIUM** 17MG

HEARTY SPOONFULS

These healthy, weight-loss-friendly soups are low in calories and feature filling vegetables and protein.

Ajiaco Bogotano (Potato Soup with Corn, Chicken & Capers)

ACTIVE: 35 mins **TOTAL:** 2 hrs 30 mins **SERVINGS:** 8

Ajiaco celebrates a key crop in the Andes, where more than 4,000 potato varieties are grown. We replaced the traditional Sabanera potatoes with readily available russets, which dissolve into the broth, giving it body. Yukon Golds and tiny creamer potatoes replace Pastusas and Criollas—the former lends a golden hue and the latter a sweet, almost buttery flavor. Guascas is a traditional Colombian herb with a grassy flavor. If you can't find it, use dried oregano.

- **3 pounds bone-in chicken breasts, skin removed**
- **2 pounds russet potatoes, peeled and cut into ¼-inch-thick rounds**
- **1½ pounds large Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and cut into ¼-inch-thick rounds**
- **1 pound gold creamer potatoes or baby yellow potatoes, peeled and cut into ¼-inch-thick rounds**
- **4 large scallions, trimmed**
- **3 cloves garlic, smashed**
- **3 fresh cilantro stems**
- **1¾ teaspoons kosher salt**
- **½ teaspoon ground pepper**
- **½ cup dried guascas or 1 bunch fresh**
- **2 ears corn, husked and cut into 4 pieces**
- **8 teaspoons heavy cream**
- **8 teaspoons capers, rinsed**
- **2 ripe avocados, sliced**

1. Combine chicken, potatoes, scallions, garlic, cilantro, salt and pepper in a large pot. Add cold water to cover. Bring to a simmer over high heat. Reduce heat to maintain a simmer and cook, skimming any foam that rises to the top, until the chicken is cooked through, 30 to 40 minutes. Using tongs, transfer the chicken to a plate and set aside to cool. Discard the scallions and cilantro.
2. Continue simmering the soup, stirring occasionally, until the potatoes have started to dissolve, 50 to 60 minutes more. Add guascas and continue cooking until the consistency is thick and creamy but there are still some chunks of potato, about 10 minutes more.
3. Meanwhile, bring a medium pot of water to a boil over high heat. Add corn and return to a boil. Cover, turn off heat and let stand for 10 minutes.
4. When the chicken is cool enough to handle, shred into four large pieces. Serve the soup topped with the chicken and corn, cream, capers and avocado.

SERVING SIZE 1¼ CUPS
PER SERVING **CALORIES** 483 **PROTEIN** 38G **CARBOHYDRATES** 57G **DIETARY FIBER** 8G **SUGARS** 4G **FAT** 13G **SATURATED FAT** 3G **CHOLESTEROL** 105MG **SODIUM** 574MG **POTASSIUM** 1333MG

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Berbere-Spiced Lentil & Turnip Soup

ACTIVE: 20 mins **TOTAL:** 5 hrs 20 mins **SERVINGS:** 10

Generally a mix of cayenne, garlic powder, cumin, cardamom, fenugreek, allspice, cinnamon, coriander and more, the Ethiopian spice blend berbere adds heat and loads of flavor to this satisfying green lentil soup. Look for it among the other spices at well-stocked grocery stores.

- **1 pound green lentils, rinsed**
- **8 cups low-sodium vegetable broth**
- **4 small turnips, peeled and cut into ½-inch pieces**
- **3 large tomatoes, peeled if desired and cut into 1-inch pieces**
- **1 large onion, diced**
- **2 stalks celery, cut into ½-inch pieces, plus leaves for garnish**
- **2 cloves garlic, grated**
- **2 tablespoons salt-free berbere spice blend**
- **1¼ teaspoons salt**
- **Plain Greek-style yogurt for serving (optional)**

1. Combine lentils, broth, turnips, tomatoes, onion, celery, garlic, berbere and salt in a 6-quart slow cooker. Stir to make sure the lentils and turnips are covered with the liquid. Cover and cook until the lentils and vegetables are tender, 5 to 6 hours on high or 8 to 10 hours on low.

2. Serve the soup topped with celery leaves and yogurt, if desired.

SERVING SIZE ABOJT 1¼ CUPS
PER SERVING: **CALORIES** 215
PROTEIN 13G **CARBOHYDRATES** 41G
DIETARY FIBER 8G **SUGARS** 7G **FAT** 1G
SODIUM 433MG **POTASSIUM** 581MG
NIACIN EQUIVALENTS 2MG
VITAMIN A 1196 U

Butternut Squash Soup with Apple Grilled Cheese Sandwiches

ACTIVE: 30 mins **TOTAL:** 45 mins
SERVINGS: 4

Layering apple slices into grilled cheese sandwiches adds a little crunch and fiber to a favorite soup dipper. And creamy butternut squash soup with ginger, cumin and turmeric is a nice change of pace from grilled cheese's usual partner, tomato soup.

- **2 tablespoons grapeseed oil or coconut oil, divided**
- **1 cup chopped onion**
- **2 tablespoons minced fresh ginger**
- **1 teaspoon ground cumin**
- **1 teaspoon ground turmeric**
- **¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper, plus more for garnish**
- **5 cups cubed (1-inch) peeled butternut squash**
- **1 (15 ounce) can light coconut milk, divided**
- **2 cups low-sodium no-chicken broth or chicken broth**
- **1 small apple, thinly sliced, divided**
- **¾ teaspoon salt**
- **1 tablespoon lime juice**
- **4 slices whole-wheat country bread**
- **1 cup shredded smoked Gouda or Cheddar cheese**
- **Ground pepper for garnish**

1. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add onion and ginger; cook, stirring, until the onion starts to soften, about 3 minutes. Add cumin, turmeric and cayenne; cook, stirring, for 30 seconds. Add squash, coconut milk (reserve 4 tablespoons for garnish, if desired), broth, half the apple slices and salt. Bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to maintain a simmer and cook, stirring occasionally, until the squash is tender, about 20 minutes. Stir in lime juice. Remove from heat.
2. Puree the soup in the pan using an immersion blender or in batches in a blender. (Use caution when blending hot liquids.)
3. Divide ½ cup cheese between 2 slices of bread. Top with the remaining apple slices, cheese and bread. Heat the remaining 1 tablespoon oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add the sandwiches and cook until lightly browned on both sides and cheese is melted, about 2 minutes per side. Cut in half. Garnish the soup with the reserved coconut milk, more cayenne and ground pepper, if desired, and serve with sandwiches.

SERVING SIZE 1½ CUPS SOUP & ½ SANDWICH
PER SERVING: **CALORIES** 419 **PROTEIN** 13.5G **CARBOHYDRATES** 43.3G **DIETARY FIBER** 8.4G **SUGARS** 10.4G **FAT** 23.1G **SATURATED FAT** 10.6G **CHOLESTEROL** 26.3MG **SODIUM** 826.9MG **POTASSIUM** 622.5MG **VITAMIN A** 16927.8IU **VITAMIN C** 28.5MG **FOLATE** 49.7MCG **CALCIUM** 298.2MG **IRON** 2.2MG **MAGNESIUM** 72.9MG

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Winter Vegetable Mulligatawny Soup

ACTIVE: 25 mins **TOTAL:** 50 mins **SERVINGS:** 4

Our meatless version of this Indian-inspired soup includes parsnip and squash to keep it hearty and satisfying.

- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 2 medium carrots, finely chopped
- 1 medium parsnip, peeled and finely chopped
- 4 cups peeled diced acorn squash or butternut squash
- 1 medium green apple, peeled and finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon curry powder
- 3 cloves garlic, minced, divided
- 1 teaspoon grated fresh ginger
- 4 cups low-sodium vegetable broth
- 1 (14 ounce) can no-salt-added diced tomatoes
- ½ cup red lentils, picked over and rinsed
- 2 whole-wheat naan flatbreads, halved
- ¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro, plus more for garnish

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Line a baking sheet with foil.

2. Heat 2 tablespoons oil in a large saucepan over medium heat until shimmering. Add onion, carrots and parsnip and cook until the onions are translucent, about 6 minutes. Add squash, apple, curry powder, 2 cloves garlic and ginger and cook, stirring, until fragrant, 1 to 2 minutes. Add broth, tomatoes and lentils and stir to combine. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to maintain a low simmer, cover and cook until the squash and lentils are tender, about 20 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, brush one side of each naan with the remaining 1 tablespoon oil. Sprinkle with the remaining 1 clove garlic and place on the prepared baking sheet. Bake until warmed, 5 to 6 minutes. Remove from oven and sprinkle with cilantro.

4. Gently mash some of the soup with a potato masher to achieve desired consistency. (Alternatively, transfer half the soup to a blender and puree. Use caution when blending hot liquids.) Garnish the soup with cilantro and serve with the naan.

SERVING SIZE ABOUT 2 CUPS SOUP & ½ NAAN
PER SERVING: **CALORIES** 487 **PROTEIN** 14G **CARBOHYDRATES** 76G **DIETARY FIBER** 14G **SUGARS** 17G **FAT** 15G **SATURATED FAT** 3G **CHOLESTEROL** 1MG **SODIUM** 406MG **POTASSIUM** 983MG **NIACIN EQUIVALENTS** 4MG **VITAMIN A** 7440IU **VITAMIN B6** 1MG

Stuffed Pepper Soup

ACTIVE: 25 mins **TOTAL:** 50 mins
SERVINGS: 4

Inspired by stuffed peppers, this soup is ready faster and dirties fewer dishes, too! Have fun with the toppings—we used onion, Cheddar cheese and tortilla chips here, but salsa, sour cream and corn would also make stellar additions.

- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 large bell peppers, chopped
- 1 poblano pepper, chopped
- 1 medium onion, chopped, plus more for serving
- 1 pound lean ground beef
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- ½ teaspoon ground pepper
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 4 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 cup quick-cooking brown rice
- ¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro, plus more for serving
- Shredded Cheddar cheese and crushed tortilla chips for serving

1. Heat oil in a large pot over medium-high heat. Add bell peppers, poblano and onion and cook, stirring often, until the vegetables start to soften, about 10 minutes. Push the vegetables to the edges. Add beef, garlic, cumin, coriander, ground pepper and salt to the middle and cook, crumbling the beef with a wooden spoon, until it's no longer pink, 3 to 5 minutes.
2. Stir in broth and rice and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to maintain a low simmer, cover and cook until the rice is tender, 15 to 20 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in cilantro.
3. Serve the soup topped with cheese, corn chips and more onion and cilantro, if desired.

SERVING SIZE 2 CUPS
PER SERVING **CALORIES** 570 **PROTEIN** 26G **CARBOHYDRATES** 51G **DIETARY FIBER** 6G **SUGARS** 7G **FAT** 28G **SATURATED FAT** 10G **CHOLESTEROL** 81MG **SODIUM** 754MG **POTASSIUM** 711MG **NIACIN EQUIVALENTS** 110MG **VITAMIN A** 2884IU

Tarkari (Afghan Vegetable & Chickpea Soup)

ACTIVE: 25 mins **TOTAL:** 35 mins
SERVINGS: 4

Try pairing this simple, satisfying vegetable soup from New Arrivals Supper Club chef Naseema Kashefi with a simple green salad or crostini to bulk up the calories.

- 2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 large carrot, diced
- 1 small onion, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 4 cups low-sodium no-chicken or vegetable broth
- 1 (15 ounce) can no-salt-added chickpeas, rinsed
- ⅔ cup frozen corn
- ⅔ cup frozen peas
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon ground pepper
- ½ cup packed chopped spinach
- Fresh cilantro for garnish

1. Heat oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add carrot, onion and garlic; cook, stirring, until the onion is soft, 3 to 4 minutes.

2. Stir in broth, chickpeas, corn, peas, salt and pepper. Bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce heat to maintain a simmer and cook, stirring occasionally, for 10 minutes. Stir in spinach and cook until wilted, about 1 minute.

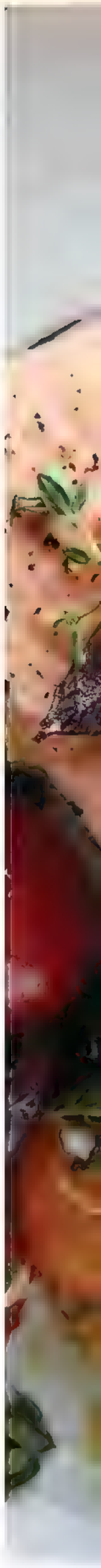
3. Serve the soup topped with cilantro, if desired.

SERVING SIZE 1½ CUPS
PER SERVING: **CALORIES** 175 **PROTEIN** 7.1G **CARBOHYDRATES** 28.5G **DIETARY FIBER** 6G **SUGARS** 5.3G **FAT** 3.4G **SATURATED FAT** 0.4G **SODIUM** 440.8MG **POTASSIUM** 358.8MG **VITAMIN A** 3875.1IU **VITAMIN C** 8.9MG **FOLATE** 35.6MCG **CALCIUM** 63.4MG **IRON** 1.7MG **MAGNESIUM** 47.9MG

A WEEK OF NO-SUGAR MEALS

Ditch added sugars and reap the benefits of the Mediterranean diet with this nourishing, satisfying seven-day plan.

EMILY LACHTRUPP, MS, RD



Though we are big dessert fans here at *EatingWell* and certainly believe that there's a place for sugar in our diet, the reality is that many of us eat more added sugars than we realize. In the United States, the average adult consumes 17 teaspoons of added sugars per day, which is far more than the American Heart Association's recommended limit of 6 to 9 teaspoons of added sugars daily.

Added sugars can be sneaky and are often found in foods that we don't even think of as being sweetened, like store-bought salad dressings, marinades, flavored yogurts and condiments. Unlike the natural sugars found in fruit and unflavored dairy products, added sugars don't contribute substantial nutrition to our diet and tend to be a source of empty calories. Though it's not necessary to avoid added sugars completely, it is a good idea to consider cutting back by taking a moment to look at nutrition labels and ingredient lists to see where they are making their way into your daily diet.

That's where this no-sugar Mediterranean diet plan comes in. You'll find that you can still eat tasty meals and snacks without any added sugar, which may help you make long-term changes. The principles of the Mediterranean diet can be applied to any cuisine, not just to foods traditional in the Mediterranean region. So feel free to swap in any ingredients or recipes that work best for you. As long as you prioritize fruits and veggies, whole grains, healthy fats and lean protein sources, you're still on track with the healthy eating principles of the Mediterranean diet.

If you're following this plan for weight loss, we set the base calories at 1,500 per day, which is a level where most people will lose weight. If you have different calorie needs, we included modifications for 1,200 and 2,000 calories per day.

How to Prep Your Week of Meals

- Make 3-Ingredient Baked Feta & Cherry Tomato Egg Muffins to have for breakfast on Days 2, 3, 5 and 7.
- Prepare Meal-Prep Vegan Lettuce Wraps to have for lunch on Days 2 through 5.

+

ROASTING THE SALMON AND VEGGIES ON A SHEET PAN KEEPS MESS TO A MINIMUM.

Day 1

BREAKFAST

(297 CALORIES)

- 1 cup nonfat plain Greek yogurt
- ¼ cup blueberries
- 3 Tbsp. chopped walnuts

A.M. SNACK

(206 CALORIES)

- ¼ cup unsalted dry-roasted almonds

LUNCH

(472 CALORIES)

Stuffed Sweet Potato with Hummus Dressing

1 large sweet potato, scrubbed
¾ cup chopped kale
1 cup canned black beans, rinsed
¼ cup hummus
2 tablespoons water

1. Prick sweet potato all over with a fork. Microwave on high until cooked through, 7 to 10 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, wash kale and drain, allowing water to cling to the leaves. Place in a medium saucepan; cover and cook over medium-high heat, stirring once or twice, until wilted. Add beans; also add a tablespoon or two of water if the pot is dry. Continue cooking, uncovered, stirring occasionally, until the mixture is steaming hot, 1 to 2 minutes.
3. Split open the sweet potato and fill it with the kale and bean mixture. Combine the hummus and 2 tablespoons water in a small dish. You can add additional water as needed to reach your desired consistency. Drizzle the hummus dressing over the stuffed sweet potato.

P.M. SNACK

(59 CALORIES)

- 1 medium peach

DINNER

(443 CALORIES)

Roasted Salmon & Tomatoes with Garlic & Olives

1 SERVING (MAKES 4)

- 1 pint cherry tomatoes, halved
- ¼ cup Kalamata olives, quartered
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 4 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme
- ½ teaspoon salt, divided
- ½ teaspoon ground pepper, divided
- 1¼ pounds salmon fillet, cut into 4 portions

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
2. Stir tomatoes, olives, 1 tablespoon oil, garlic, thyme, ¼ teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper together in a medium bowl. Spread the mixture on half ofa large rimmed sheet pan. Brush the remaining 1 tablespoon oil all over the salmon pieces; sprinkle with the remaining ¼ teaspoon each salt and pepper. Place on the empty side of the sheet pan. Bake until the tomatoes have broken down and the salmon is just cooked through, 12 to 15 minutes. Serve the tomato mixture atop the salmon.

DAILY TOTALS: CALORIES 1,476 **PROTEIN** 91G **FAT** 59G **CARBOHYDRATES** 158G **FIBER** 35G **SODIUM** 1,127MG

To make it 1,200 calories: Reduce to 1 Tbsp. chopped walnuts at breakfast and change the A.M. snack to 1 plum.

To make it 2,000 calories: Add 1 small apple to lunch, add 1 cup edamame in pods to P.M. snack, and add a side salad topped with avocado to dinner.

Day 2

BREAKFAST

(250 CALORIES)

3-Ingredient Baked Feta & Cherry Tomato Egg Muffins

1 SERVING (MAKES 4)

- 1½ cups cherry tomatoes, halved
- 2 ounces feta cheese, cubed
- 6 large eggs
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- Ground pepper to taste
- Thinly sliced fresh basil for garnish

1. Preheat oven to 325°F. Coat 8 muffin-tin cups with cooking spray or use silicone muffin-tin liners.
2. Divide tomatoes and feta among the prepared cups. Whisk eggs, salt and pepper to taste in a medium bowl. Pour the eggs over the tomatoes and feta in the muffin cups. Top with basil, if desired.
3. Bake until the eggs are set, 20 to 25 minutes. Let cool in the pan for 5 minutes before serving. If not serving immediately, transfer to a wire rack to cool completely before refrigerating for up to 4 days or freezing for up to 3 months.

SERVE WITH

- 1 medium apple

A.M. SNACK

(141 CALORIES)

- 1 cup low-fat plain kefir
- ½ cup blackberries

LUNCH

(425 CALORIES)

Meal-Prep Vegan Lettuce Wraps

1 SERVING (MAKES 4)

- 1 small clove garlic, chopped
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt, divided
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

¼ cup lemon juice
2 tablespoons ground cumin
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
2 (15-ounce) cans dark red kidney beans, rinsed
1 (15-ounce) can chickpeas, rinsed
1 cup finely diced carrot
1½ cups chopped fresh parsley
½ cup chopped fresh mint
2 heads butter or Bibb lettuce, leaves separated
1½ cups cooked quinoa, cooled to room temperature

1. Sprinkle garlic with ½ teaspoon salt and mash with the side of a knife or with a fork to form a paste. Scrape the paste into a large bowl. Add the remaining ½ teaspoon salt, oil, lemon juice, cumin and cinnamon and whisk to combine. Stir in kidney beans, chickpeas, carrot, parsley and ⅓ cup mint.
2. To prepare 1 serving of lettuce wraps: Place 3 lettuce leaves in a single-serving lidded container. Top each leap with 2 tablespoons quinoa and ⅓ cup beans.

P.M. SNACK

(238 CALORIES)

- 15 dried walnut halves
- ½ cup blueberries

DINNER

(445 CALORIES)

Creamy Garlic Skillet Chicken with Spinach

1 SERVING (MAKES 4)

1 pound chicken cutlets
½ teaspoon salt, divided
½ teaspoon ground pepper, divided
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
3 large cloves garlic, grated
½ cup dry white wine
2 cups coarsely chopped fresh spinach
½ cup heavy cream
1 cup cooked whole-wheat penne

1. Sprinkle chicken with ¼ teaspoon each salt and pepper. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the chicken and cook, turning once, until browned and cooked through, about 6 minutes. Transfer to a plate.
2. Add garlic to the pan and cook, stirring, for 30 seconds. Increase heat to medium-high and add wine. Cook until slightly reduced, about 1 minute. Return heat to medium and stir in spinach, cream and remaining ¼ teaspoon each salt and pepper. Simmer for 2 minutes. Return the chicken to the pan along with the penne and turn to coat with the sauce.

DAILY TOTALS: CALORIES 1,500 **PROTEIN** 75G **FAT** 72G **CARBOHYDRATES** 144G **FIBER** 31G **SODIUM** 1,245MG

To make it 1,200 calories: Omit kefir at A.M. snack and omit walnuts at P.M. snack.

To make it 2,000 calories: Add 1 serving peanut butter and jam on an English muffin to breakfast and add 30 unsalted dry-roasted almonds to A.M. snack.

Day 3

BREAKFAST
(250 CALORIES)

- 1 serving 3-Ingredient Baked Feta & Cherry Tomato Egg Muffins
- 1 medium apple

A.M. SNACK
(182 CALORIES)

- 1 cup low-fat plain Greek yogurt
- ¼ cup raspberries

LUNCH
(425 CALORIES)

- 1 serving Meal-Prep Vegan Lettuce Wraps

P.M. SNACK
(59 CALORIES)

- 1 medium peach

DINNER
(588 CALORIES)

Massaged Kale Salad with Roasted Sweet Potato & Black Beans
1 SERVING (MAKES 4)

- **1 large sweet potato, cut into ½-inch-thick wedges**
- **5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided**
- **2 teaspoons ancho chile powder**
- **½ teaspoon salt, divided**
- **6 medium shallots, peeled and quartered**
- **3 tablespoons lemon juice**
- **1 large clove garlic, grated**
- **1 pound kale, stemmed and torn**
- **1 (15-ounce) can no-salt-added black beans, rinsed**
- **1 cup cooked quinoa**
- **½ cup crumbled feta cheese**
- **½ cup unsalted pepitas, toasted**

1. Position racks in upper and lower thirds of oven; preheat to 425°F.
2. Toss sweet potato with 1 tablespoon oil, chile powder and ⅛ teaspoon salt on a large rimmed baking sheet. Toss shallots with 1 tablespoon oil and ⅛ teaspoon salt on another large rimmed baking sheet. Roast the vegetables, flipping once, until tender and caramelized, about 20 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, whisk lemon juice and garlic with the remaining 3 tablespoons oil and ¼ teaspoon salt in a large bowl. Add kale and massage with the dressing until bright green and shiny and volume is reduced by about half. Add beans, quinoa, feta, pepitas and shallots. Toss to combine, and serve topped with the sweet potato.

DAILY TOTALS: CALORIES 1,503 **PROTEIN** 71G **FAT** 65G **CARBOHYDRATES** 169G **FIBER** 38G **SODIUM** 1,538MG

To make it 1,200 calories: Omit apple at breakfast and yogurt at A.M. snack, and change P.M. snack to 1 plum.

To make it 2,000 calories: Add 2 Tbsp. natural peanut butter to breakfast, add 1 medium orange to lunch and add ¼ cup unsalted dry-roasted almonds to P.M. snack.

Day 4

BREAKFAST
(297 CALORIES)

- 1 serving yogurt with blueberries
- 3 Tbsp. chopped walnuts

A.M. SNACK
(75 CALORIES)

- ½ cup low-fat plain kefir
- ⅓ cup blackberries

LUNCH
(425 CALORIES)

- 1 serving Meal-Prep Vegan Lettuce Wraps

P.M. SNACK
(206 CALORIES)

- ¼ cup unsalted dry-roasted almonds

DINNER
(514 CALORIES)

Chicken & Vegetable Penne with Parsley-Walnut Pesto

1 SERVING (MAKES 4)

- ¾ cup chopped walnuts
- 1 cup lightly packed parsley leaves
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed and peeled
- ½ teaspoon plus ⅛ teaspoon salt
- ⅛ teaspoon ground pepper
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- ⅓ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1½ cups shredded or sliced cooked skinless chicken breast (8 ounces)
- 6 ounces whole-wheat penne or fusilli pasta (1¾ cups)
- 8 ounces green beans, trimmed and halved crosswise (2 cups)
- 2 cups cauliflower florets (8 ounces)

1. Bring a large pot of water to a boil.
2. Place walnuts in a small bowl and microwave on high until fragrant and lightly toasted, 2 to 2½ minutes. (Alternatively, toast the walnuts in a small dry skillet over medium-low heat, stirring constantly, until fragrant, 2 to 3 minutes.) Transfer to a plate and let cool. Set ¼ cup aside for topping.
3. Combine the remaining ½ cup walnuts, parsley, garlic, salt, and pepper in a food processor. Process until the nuts are ground. With the motor running, gradually add oil through the feed tube. Add Parmesan and pulse until mixed in. Scrape the pesto into a large bowl. Add the chicken.
4. Meanwhile, cook the pasta in the boiling water for 4 minutes. Add green beans and cauliflower; cover and cook until the pasta is al dente (almost tender) and the vegetables are tender, 5 to 7 minutes more. Before draining, scoop out ¾ cup of the cooking water and stir it into the pesto-chicken mixture to warm it slightly. Drain the pasta and vegetables and add to the pesto-chicken mixture. Toss to coat well. Divide among 4 pasta bowls and top each serving with 1 Tbsp. of the reserved walnuts.

DAILY TOTALS: CALORIES, 1,518 **PROTEIN** 85G **FAT** 81G **CARBOHYDRATES** 128G **FIBER** 31G **SODIUM** 1,077MG

To make it 1,200 calories: Omit walnuts at breakfast and change P.M. snack to 1 plum.

To make it 2,000 calories: Add 1 serving peanut butter and jam on an English muffin to breakfast, add 1 medium apple to lunch and add 1 serving of basic green salad to dinner.

Day 5

BREAKFAST
(250 CALORIES)

- 1 serving 3-Ingredient Baked Feta & Cherry Tomato Egg Muffins
- 1 medium apple

A.M. SNACK
(182 CALORIES)

- 1 cup low-fat plain Greek yogurt
- ¼ cup raspberries

LUNCH
(425 CALORIES)

- 1 serving Meal-Prep Vegan Lettuce Wraps

P.M. SNACK
(200 CALORIES)

- 1 cup edamame, in pods

DINNER
(457 CALORIES)

Stuffed Eggplant with Couscous & Almonds

1 SERVING (MAKES 4)

- ⅔ cup water plus 1 tablespoon, divided
- ½ cup whole-wheat couscous
- ½ teaspoon salt, divided
- 2 medium eggplants (about 1 pound each)
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- ¼ teaspoon ground pepper
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped
- ⅓ cup mayonnaise
- 2 teaspoons harissa paste or ½ teaspoon harissa seasoning
- ½ cup chopped smoke-flavored almonds
- ½ cup chopped fresh parsley

1. Preheat grill to medium-high.
2. Combine ⅔ cup water, couscous and ⅛ teaspoon salt in a small saucepan. Bring to a boil over high heat. Remove from heat, cover and set aside.
3. Halve eggplants through the stem; brush the cut sides with 2 tablespoons oil and sprinkle with ¼ teaspoon salt and pepper. Grill the eggplants, flipping once halfway, until charred and tender, 10 to 12 minutes. Let cool for 5 minutes.
4. Meanwhile, mash garlic with the remaining ⅛ teaspoon salt on a cutting board with a fork. Combine the garlic paste, mayonnaise, harissa and the remaining 1 tablespoon water in a small bowl.
5. Leaving a ¼-inch-thick wall, carefully scoop out the eggplant flesh and chop. Stir the eggplant flesh into the couscous along with almonds, parsley and the remaining 1 tablespoon oil. Mound the filling in the eggplant shells. Serve with the sauce.

DAILY TOTALS: CALORIES 1,514 **PROTEIN** 74G **FAT** 74G **CARBOHYDRATES** 145G **FIBER** 40G **SODIUM** 1,429MG

To make it 1,200 calories: Omit yogurt at A.M. snack and change P.M. snack to 1 plum.

To make it 2,000 calories: Add 2 Tbsp. natural peanut butter to breakfast, add ¼ cup unsalted dry-roasted almonds to A.M. snack and add 1 medium peach to P.M. snack.

Day 6

BREAKFAST
(297 CALORIES)

- 1 serving yogurt with blueberries
- 3 Tbsp. chopped walnuts

A.M. SNACK
(268 CALORIES)

- 1 cup blackberries
- ¼ cup unsalted dry-roasted almonds

LUNCH
(335 CALORIES)

Green Goddess Salad with Chickpeas

1 SERVING (MAKES 2)

DRESSING
- 1 avocado, peeled and pitted
- 1½ cups buttermilk
- ¼ cup chopped fresh herbs, such as tarragon, sorrel, mint, parsley and cilantro
- 2 tablespoons rice vinegar
- ½ teaspoon salt

SALAD
- 3 cups chopped romaine lettuce
- 1 cup sliced cucumber
- 1 (15-ounce) can chickpeas, rinsed
- ¼ cup diced low-fat Swiss cheese
- 6 cherry tomatoes, halved if desired

SERVE WITH

- 1 plum

P.M. SNACK
(174 CALORIES)

- 1 cup low-fat plain kefir
- 1 cup raspberries

DINNER
(442 CALORIES)

Shrimp & Pepper Kebabs with Grilled Red Onion Slaw

1 SERVING (MAKES 4)

- ½ cup chopped fresh parsley
- ⅓ cup chopped scallions
- ⅓ cup crumbled feta cheese
- 3 tablespoons red-wine vinegar
- ⅓ cup canola oil plus 1 tablespoon, divided
- 1 pound raw shrimp (21–25 pieces), peeled and deveined
- 24 mini bell peppers (15 ounces)
- 1 small red onion, cut into quarters
- 1 (10-ounce) package coleslaw mix (with carrots and red cabbage)
- 1½ cups pita chips, crushed

1. Preheat grill to medium-high.
2. Place parsley, scallions, feta, vinegar and ⅓ cup oil in a mini food processor; blend until mostly smooth. Set dressing aside.
3. Thread 3 shrimp and 3 mini peppers on each of 8 bamboo skewers. Brush the kebabs and onion with the remaining 1 tablespoon oil. Grill the kebabs until the shrimp turn pink and are opaque in the center and the peppers are lightly charred, about 3 minutes per side. Grill the onion wedges until slightly softened and charred, 2 to 3 minutes per side. Remove from the grill.
4. Reserve ¼ cup of the dressing. Combine slaw mix, pita chips and the remaining dressing in a large bowl. When the onion is cool enough to handle, thinly slice and toss with the slaw mixture.
5. Serve the slaw and kebabs with the reserved dressing.

DAILY TOTALS: CALORIES 1,516 **PROTEIN** 98G **FAT** 73G **CARBOHYDRATES** 133G **FIBER** 38G **SODIUM** 1,051MG

To make it 1,200 calories:
Omit almonds at A.M. snack and omit kefir at P.M. snack.

To make it 2,000 calories:
Add 1 serving peanut butter and jam on an English muffin to breakfast, add 12 dried walnut halves to P.M. snack and add a 1-oz. slice of whole-wheat baguette to dinner.

Day 7

BREAKFAST
(250 CALORIES)

- 1 serving 3-Ingredient Baked Feta & Cherry Tomato Egg Muffins
- 1 medium apple

A.M. SNACK
(282 CALORIES)

- 1 cup low-fat plain Greek yogurt
- ⅓ cup raspberries
- 2 Tbsp. chopped walnuts

LUNCH
(335 CALORIES)

- 1 serving Green Goddess Salad with Chickpeas
- 1 plum

P.M. SNACK
(200 CALORIES)

- 1 cup edamame, in pods

DINNER
(431 CALORIES)

Quinoa Avocado Salad with Buttermilk Dressing

1 SERVING (MAKES 4)

- ¼ cup buttermilk
- ¼ cup crème fraîche
- 2 tablespoons white balsamic vinegar
- 5 tablespoons lemon juice, divided
- 2 tablespoons minced shallot
- 1 small clove garlic, grated
- ½ teaspoon salt, divided
- ⅛ teaspoon ground pepper plus ¼ teaspoon, divided
- 2 tablespoons grapeseed or avocado oil, divided
- 1¼ cups cooked quinoa, divided
- 2 heads Belgian endive, cut into ½-inch pieces
- 2 firm ripe Fuyu persimmons or pears, thinly sliced
- 2 ripe avocados, sliced
- ¼ cup chopped fresh dill

1. Whisk buttermilk, crème fraîche, vinegar, 1 tablespoon lemon juice, shallot, garlic, ¼ teaspoon salt and ⅛ teaspoon pepper in a small bowl. Set dressing aside.

2. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a medium skillet over medium-high heat. Add ¼ cup quinoa and cook, stirring occasionally, until crispy, 3 to 4 minutes. Transfer to a plate and let cool.

3. Combine endive and persimmons (or pears) with the remaining 1 cup quinoa, 1 tablespoon oil, 2 tablespoons lemon juice and ⅛ teaspoon each salt and pepper in a medium bowl; toss to coat. Spread on a platter. Drizzle avocado with the remaining 2 tablespoons lemon juice and sprinkle with the remaining ⅛ teaspoon each salt and pepper. Arrange on the platter. Drizzle with the reserved dressing. Serve topped with dill and the crispy quinoa.

DAILY TOTALS: 1,498 **CALORIES** 82G **PROTEIN**, 67G **FAT**, 152G **CARBOHYDRATES** 42G **FIBER** 1,335MG **SODIUM**

To make it 1,200 calories: Omit walnuts at A.M. snack and change P.M. snack to ¼ cup blueberries.

To make it 2,000 calories: Add 2 Tbsp. natural peanut butter to breakfast, add 1 serving avocado toast to lunch, add 1 medium peach to P.M. snack, and add slice whole-wheat baguette to dinner.

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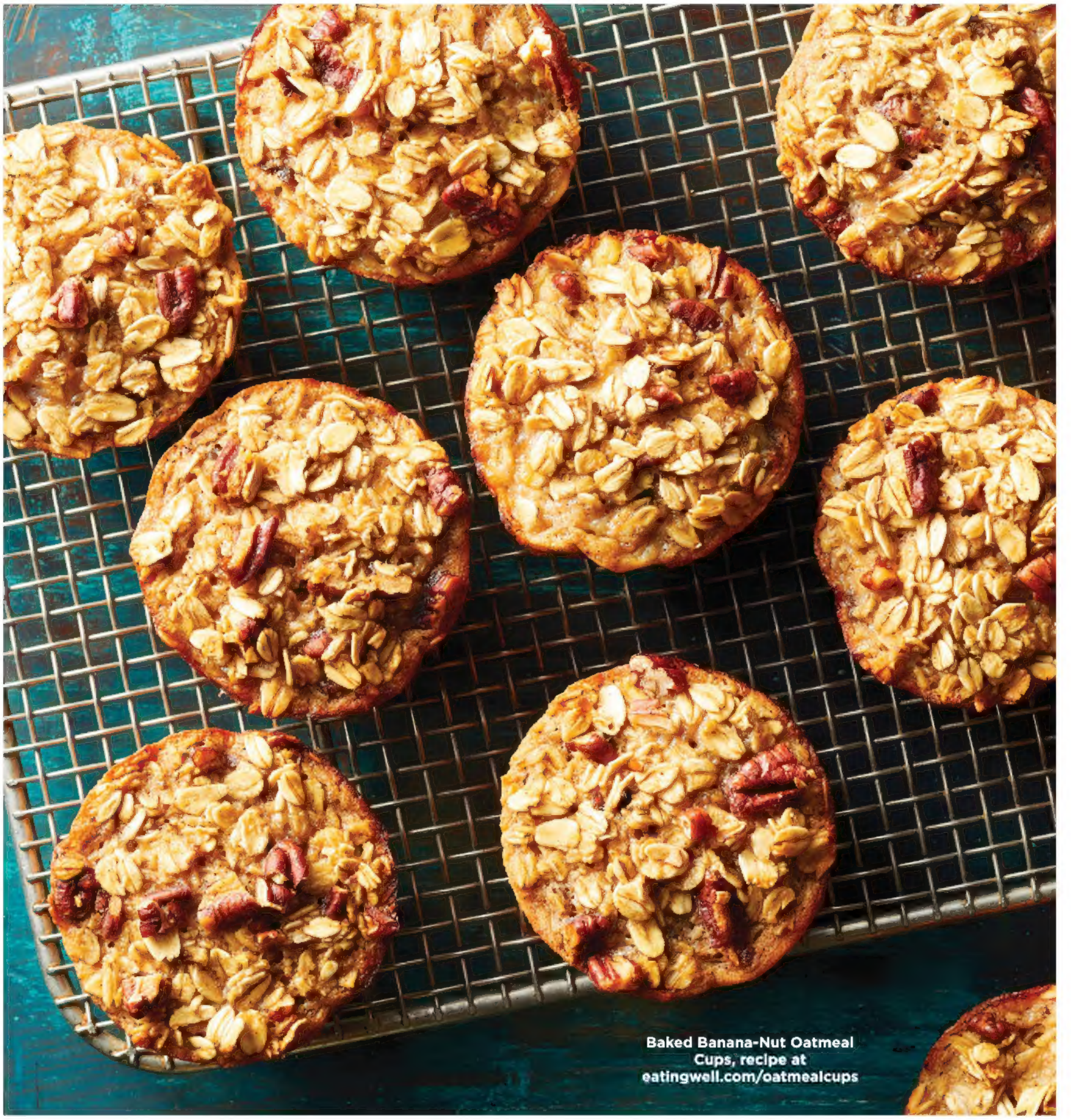

Baked Banana-Nut Oatmeal Cups, recipe at eatingwell.com/oatmealcups

Fuel Weight Loss with Fiber

Increasing your fiber intake can help with weight loss, regardless of what other dietary steps you're taking. In a 2019 trial, participants were assigned to one of four different calorie-restricted dieting groups. They were also instructed to increase their dietary fiber intake at various intervals and to include 90 minutes of physical activity each week. The results showed that regardless of diet type, all the participants lost about the same amount of weight. The study's authors believe this was because of fiber intake, which affirms what previous studies showed: Eating more fiber can help you lose weight. Fiber-rich foods not only fill you up faster and keep you satisfied longer, but they also prevent your body from absorbing some of the calories in the other foods you eat. With a well-rounded diet that includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes and whole grains, you will likely get the amount of fiber your body needs to run efficiently.

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The Perfectly POWERFUL Peanut

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A weight loss plan does not have to be restrictive or expensive. Science shows that eating nutrient-dense foods can help make weight loss simple—and tasty.